

·ANGEL·IN·GOOGLES·



·Secular·Scriptures·

·by·Randall·H·Wells·

ANGEL IN GOGGLES: Secular Scriptures

283 pages and over 200 luminoustrations.

By Randall A. Wells, Ph.D.

To Sidney Wells Vasaune

“Nothing is holy, much is precious.”

The Angel Unfaith

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Also by the author:

Along the Waccamaw: A Yankee Discovers a Home by the River.
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American Places of the Heart
Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin, 1990.

Stretch: Explore, Explain, Persuade.
Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998.

*Swamp, Strand, & Steamboat: Voices of Horry County, South Carolina,
1732-1954.* Conway, S.C.: Horry County Historical Society, 2004.

Old Times in Horry County: A Narrative History.
Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2007.

Floydiana: Archive of the Serial Online Book, 2013-2017
Available for viewing at oldchurchgallery.org, cultural arts collections of Old
Church Gallery, Ltd., Floyd, VA.

Wells also directed the Horry County, S.C., Oral History Project.

Having studied or taught at ten colleges or universities, he retired from Coastal
Carolina University, after thirty years, as Distinguished Professor of English &
Speech.

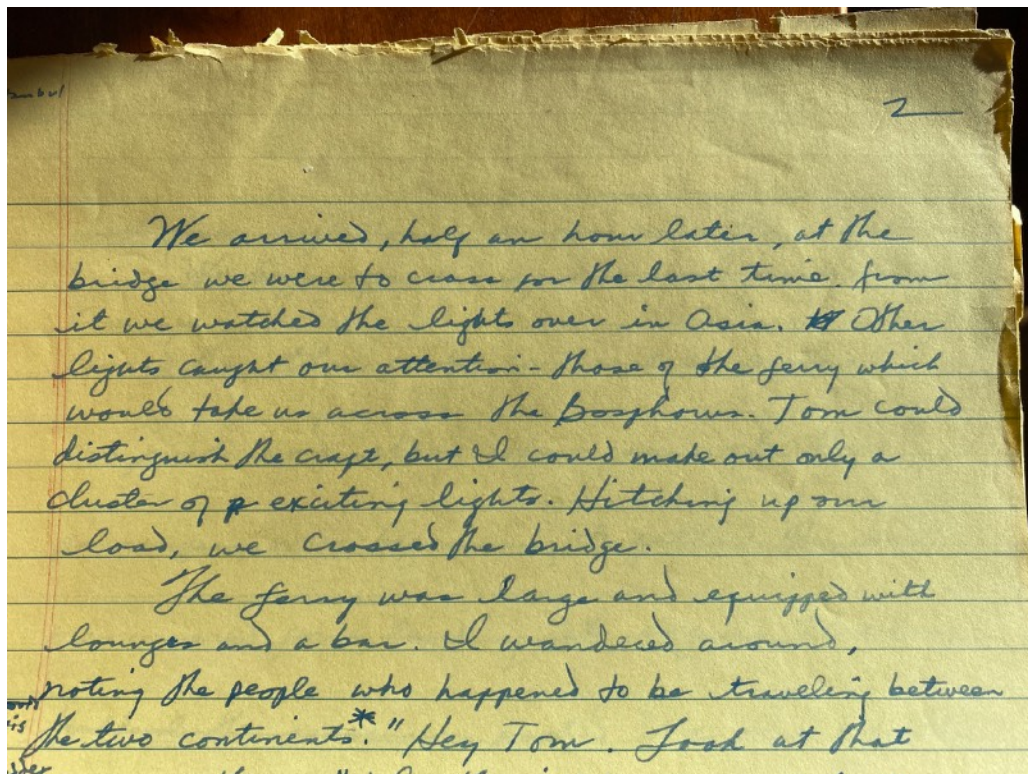
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I thank Marjory Wells for waiting out creative frenzies inseparable from drudgery. Also for giving advice as tactful as it was valuable, and for reminding me not to hunch over the computer.

Thank you, Paul O. Zelinsky, for what approaches a collaboration on Scripture 18, *Rapunzel*. Even a seer can be astigmatic, so for their help I thank friends and relatives in a dozen states from Hawaii to Florida: Tom Hollinger, Jane Cundiff, Marie Henry, Amanda Hollinger, Joanne C. Irvin, Dennis Ross, Andrea Vasaune, Carol Widmer, Richard O. Collin, and Marilyn Rutter. And for sharing their responses to one or more scriptures: Nora Hollinger, Alan Grindal, Jennifer Albright, Reggie Daves, Mike Duff, Jeff Eggart, Ann First, Fred First, Elizabeth Grob, Jim Henderson, Linda Henderson, Merry Macke, Joanie Oakes, Joan Piroch, Becky B. Pomponio, Anna Siegler, Dudley C. Wells, Katie Wells, Ted Walkup, and Allison Faix.

I thank several well-remembered “lates.” Mr. Henry J. Firley for assigning a journal during my last semester at Glenbard West High School, 1960. Its third sequel was a light-blue, hardbound “Record,” 12 X 7½ slim inches. Carried over the Atlantic in 1961, it became a source for the first two scriptures in the *Geodysey* series. Its continuation became the main source for another series, *The Estate*.

Thanks also to Mrs. Virginia Stone of the *Glen Ellyn* (Illinois) *News* for agreeing to print the bi-weekly travelog in 1961-62 that would become another source. And to Professor Carolyn L. Blair of Maryville College (Tennessee) for listening to the first version of “*Erzerum Coming!*” (Scripture 9) as I read it aloud from this yellow legal pad in 1962.



The ferry crosses from Istanbul to Asia on blue ink. “Hey Tom.”

The *Field & Herald* (Conway, South Carolina) printed the original stray-mutt account in 1978 (Scripture 13). For valuable source-material I thank Tom Hollinger, Fred First, Anna Siegler, and Jenny Olsen. During our global adventure, Fall 1961-Spring 1962, Tom took most of the *National Geographic*-like photographs on 35 mm Kodak film wound in a heavy camera. Later he rescued these slides from the dusty clutches of time by digitizing them on a high-quality scanner.

To my fellow alphabeteer, Fred, I express gratitude for patience and computer expertise. Out on Goose Creek Run, Virginia, farthest outpost of InDesign, I spent many a congenial hour transferring red-scrawled changes from printouts onto one final electronic version after another. Cookies by Ann.

Revisions of 2023 and 2025

Randall's UnBible avails itself of the cell-phone camera. And it ransacks the Internet—often *Wikipedia*, an undreamed-of resource to which the author sends an annual donation. He recognizes those people who have encouraged the endeavor, especially Dennis Ross, Don Samson, Kathleen Ingoldsby, Ralph Roe (“Just an engineer”), and Libby Lee Burke (classmate at Maryville College). He also thanks Chris Angileri for a range of vital technical services. Also “Doctors” Liz Warriner, Fred First, and Tim Smith for the house-calls.

And Marjory? “What should I thank you for?” “*Everything.*”

Indeed. You not only grace numerous pages but originated the scripture on *Rapunzel*. You were able, moreover, to carry on while your husband played St. Thomas Aquinas the monk—occasionally arising at 3 or 4 a.m., he would join a vigil by way of classical music broadcast from radio stations around the country. Tying his robe with a version of the braided belt, he would take his place at the scriptorium. Marjory, you also ignored this occasional wisecrack: “I’m depressed again—thinking of all the people who aren’t getting to write this book.” Yes, you did call attention to unequally-performed housework and unplayed guitar. And once when your husband’s creative haste, plus overlarge slippers, caused him to slam into the edge of a stair, you christened the hematoma “Norman.”

As a Christian you tolerated secularity. May you continue to enjoy friends both in person and on the telephone, hikes up and down Annie Lane, interests both civic and religious, yoga class, and Kindle Books, but now along with fewer solitary jigsaw-puzzles and more husband.

In 2024, Tom discovered a lode of unremembered color-slides, a half-dozen of which now join the many photographic windows that look onto an expedition of sixty years earlier.



For computer help in 2025, Randall thanks neighbor Mike Ferry and grandson Sidney W. Vasaune. At a party to mark Sid’s graduation from high school, the author had the luck to re-encounter David E. Lee. A longtime friend of daughter Andrea’s, he brought Apple to *Angel*—via expertise with the *Pages* word-processing program.

This book could not have taken its final shape without David’s steady hand and creative vision. He proofread and typeset the manuscript, applied digital and AI tools to carefully restore and enhance images

while leaving others untouched to preserve their history. He even recorded the seven diatonic modes for the accompanying material. Week after week, he came to my apartment, bringing with him not only technical expertise but also patience, insight, and commitment.

Exegesis

"I always wanted to meet a real secular humanist!"

An unknown fellow has just walked over to our dinner table at my fiftieth high school reunion. As he looks down at me, I gather that he has read my page in the booklet of profiles. I mumble something amiable before he turns and walks away, having neglected to secure an autograph.

What does the subtitle of this book mean by "secular"? Now I dare to tape sixteen theses to the oaken Door of Holiness, each beginning with No.

Sacrilege or sacreage
Perfect, eternal, beneficent, hidden power
Ditto evil power, either abstract or pointy-eared
Prayer other than crossed fingers
Messiah, mullah, or Mother
Pantheon or "holy-panther" mushroom
Holy water or Herod slaughter
Movable fasts or pancake suppers
Ban on pushing eyfele on the Sabbath
Homosapienism
"Gott mit Uns" and "Under God"
Winged guardian, messenger, or avenger
Stewardship, schism, or sexual abuse
Ba'al or Billy
Styx, heaven, tarnation, or reincarnation
Holy-lujah music
"Fah who foraze! Dah who doraze!" ("Welcome Christmas")

Today I found myself sharing an elevator with a woman and two young black children. I reached around from the button-panel, invited one of the kids to squeeze my little finger, and up we rose. "How did you do that?!" "Magic." "Do it again!" For a secular person this experience—intimate, merry, transcending race and age, was close enough to spiritual.

These scriptures flip a featherful of ink in the eyes of any religious threat to human safety, responsibility, freedom, and dignity. Also of any political-religious impulse, so the author won't be popping champagne aboard a helicopter that lowers a steeple onto the Capitol. Most of *Angel* simply views the world from non-religious perspectives, and when it seems to wax polemical, it actually encourages freethinkers rather than challenges believers.

"Free" is a subjective state, so that the passenger in 16A feels liberated from the earth, while 16B feels jammed into in a tube with toilets. Thinking itself has many obstacles. One is the fear of violating orthodoxy, a pressure intensified by the threat of divine punishment. Corrupt and violent mankind has already been drowned (like the baby rabbits in *Angel*); the Old Rugged Cross has pushed many a recusant into hell; and Allā the Merciful (an honorific often repeated),

has sent unbelievers galore to the flames,. All of these human-invented challenges to thinking are bizarreries for which humans will answer on Judgment Day.

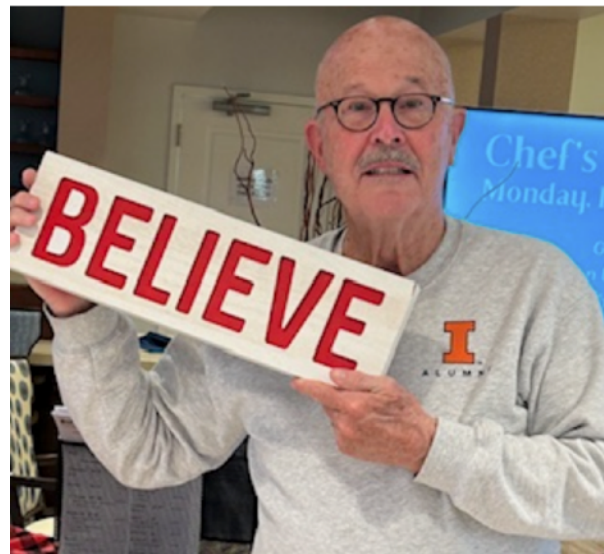
Angel spreads its wings for those who reject the four thousand religions of the world, twelve of them major. Also for those who observe official rites with perhaps more affection than commitment, or with more concern for familial, social, or political standing. For those who merely go through motions like the *Bravo!-Bravi!* Man: he stands at the far-top-back of the Lyric Opera House in Chicago and prompts an accolade after each aria.

Over decades, Randall went metaphorically deaf (as his “Uncle” Charlie did literally) to anything transcendent or supernally immanent. He had already given up hope of becoming an angel, because, although white, he developed a bass voice. Now if someone says “Have a blest day,” he plays in traffic, and if he sneezes, he sticks fingers-in-ears to muffle a “God bless you.” He believes that Gaia is a material girl, all we have and all we get. Wonder, yes; worship, no. Even his refrigerator is more otherworldly, for it disables portions of itself on the Sabbath.

So *Angel*—title of Billy Graham’s book—rejects and even defies any notions of divine freedom, peace, providence. Yet it acknowledges that in this world—this anti-Eden of war, cruelty, accident, and disease—religion is a source of guidance, comfort, inspiration, and inclusion. Another *yet*: the author can become acidulous about sacred. He lacks the faith of his pal Tom, who believes in the Easter Bunny “because I’ve seen the eggs.” So if you, the reader, fold hands in supplication, or unroll a rug toward Mecca, or even consider yourself “electrical-spiritual” like the author’s acquaintance Hattie Cloud—best shut these covers and read *Angels: God’s Secret Agents*, by Billy Graham.

Both of the Randall’s parents were “churchers” (term used by an oral history interviewee, Andrew Stanley). They were also faithful neighbors, friends, colleagues, and kinfolk.

His father, Dudley (b. 1914), had what Betty admired as *joie de vivre*. It was laced with impish deadpan. He also had a penchant for helping others. One small example. During the ten years that he commuted by coal-burner train between Glen Ellyn and Chicago, he would lift his always-shined shoes through the rail yards between the Chicago & Northwestern station and the Montgomery Ward & Co. headquarters. One winter night he was holding a pair of chili-dogs when, at the Chicago River, a voice sounded, loud and marveling: “What’s that *smell?!?*” My father glanced up to see the bridge-tender leaning out of the booth: “I gave him one.” Raised as an Oak Park Baptist, he was a Straight Arrow. With a few wobbly shots. At a business school picnic, he swam so far along Lake Michigan that his classmates nearly called an ambulance for his towel-rubbed body. In another tale—never brought up, affirmed or denied—he took an overnight journey to Iowa on a freight train, his sleeping car the empty engineer’s booth.



My parents, athletic and good-looking, met on the tennis courts of Oak Park. As a girl Betty Jane Capps played sports at a summer camp in the Poconos owned by her aunt and uncle. As a parent she did a lot of physical housework—“This is my paintin’ arm!”—and now declines my phone call so as to haul laundry between the basement and second floor of heaven. She introduced little Randy to classical music via the radio—Uncle Normy’s *Four Hundred Hour*, “music on records,” sponsored by the Union Pacific Railroad. Her alter ego was Dame Joan Sutherland.

For twenty years she also worked half-time as a librarian clerk. She was celebrated for a droll repartee with an often sharp-tongue. She was also a keen observer and judge. “They’re good people,” she once asserted, taking a thoughtful puff over a mystery novel, “but they’re not *big* people.” She would also decry the untimely, the untoward, the unfair: “It’s a crime.”

The author, too, refuses to “keep on the sunny side of life” despite the ditty by Howard Entwisle (1866-1903). In fact this song also laments “a dark and troubled side of life”: “*Oh, the storm and its fury broke today, / Crushing hopes that we cherish so dear.*” The lyrics do offer promise: “*Clouds and storms will in time pass away, / The sun again will shine bright and clear.*” But optimism depends on dependence: “*Let us trust in our Savior alway / Who keepeth every one in His care.*” As to enduring bad weather, one Broadway song gives this advice: “*If you walk through a storm, hold your head up high.*” Independence but at the cost of sentimentality—of enjoying an emotion without paying for it. And self reliance but with the comfort of company, for you won’t be walking alone. So God doesn’t know to get out of the rain.

Unlike the Bible, these scriptures include visual images—electro-luminous photographs and sketches.”A godsend,” St. Thomas Aquinas might have said. The sections also profit from first-handedness by drawing on the author’s four-score-and-counting years. This span, if traced backward decade by decade from 1942, would reach the election of Abraham Lincoln. For the longevity that Randall has been vouchsafed (an Episcopalian word) he feels a solemn gratitude.

The scriptures of *Angel* vary in length, like those of the Bible—with its single-chapter *Johns* and hundred & fifty chapter *Psalms*. They also vary in type like the heterogeneous Hebrew and Christian scrolls all Gideon together:

Law, poetry, historical narrative, wisdom literature, psalms, novella, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, gospel, acts of the apostles, epistles.

Holy Hodge-Podge! Any of the sixty-six Biblical books, moreover, can include fables, parables, riddles, maxims, monologues, and dialogues. (“Biblical genre,” *Wikipedia*, accessed Feb. 2022.) The Qur’ān, by contrast, employs a single mode of delivery—recitation or declamation—however varied its topics and poetic techniques. Although *Angel* offers no Psalms (songs or poems meant to be sung), it hums & strums throughout, and occasionally bursts into verse. It does record manifold Acts of the Author, and it hands down two Books of Proverbs. A treatise on Plenitude comprises seven intermittent scriptures.

Please note that if English lacks a term, Randall will gladly enrich plenitude by squeezing two words together to create the *mot jus*. And that he will allow *Angel*, to mix the invaluable with the lamentable and functional. And that to him the Bachstowski orchestration of *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* seems to announce the entrance of God.

The Scripturama

Geodyssey: A raffish travelogue. This intermittent series recounts an expedition begun by nineteen-year-old pals on October 2, 1961. Like a pair of secular Mormon missionaries, they testify as to the earth's spherical shape. To its watery or solid terrain. To its places, inhabitants, animals & insects, customs, and weather. "What a friend we have in Jesus," declares the hymn. But a friend who trods the earth in boots, rather than sandals, merits conviviality, admiration, and tolerance rather than prayer.

The Estate: The retired author and his wife hope to stay put in Virginia. Their experience offers a counterpoint to the *Geodyssey* series: e. g., tracks vs. tract. The couple treasures acreage on a spine of the Blue Ridge Plateau with its scenery, seasons, weather, flora, fauna, rocky soil, and visits by grandchild. But shun the frumious Bittersweet!

Distinction & Multitude: Unlike *Geodyssey*, this series travels figuratively, like Robert Frost on his diverging roads. Unlike both the travelogue and *The Estate*, the scriptures of *Distinction & Multitude* progress logically rather than chronologically. A cumulative treatise, it draws inspiration from *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas' (written in Latin, 1225-1274). They explore Plenitude, or unending fullness—God-created categories that invite further subdivision, ad infinitum. This very phantasmagoria, however, is what *Angel* interprets as the essence of life.

Essay: Look into, and out of The Window, an everyday object with amazing variations and contexts. Another essay considers mankind's relationship with another species—the dog, which itself has countless sub-species. (This scripture notes that Man's Best Friend may bite, bark, and booty-bomb.) Another scripture, "Proprioception" illuminates a sixth sense, shared by mammals and valued for dealing with gravity (unnecessary for angels). A fourth essay appreciates Zelinsky's book *Rapunzel*, the retelling of a folk tale with words and distinguished paintings.

Story: In the Bible, weather is sent in order to fish-admonish someone, or flood-punish someone, or rainbow-reconcile with all of mankind. Unsent celestial-like snow in *Angel*, however, tests the author's ethical judgment. Besides this scripture and several other Once-Upon-a-Times, most others are enriched by narration.

Duologue: Randall meets with the curator of Oprichting van Kabinet in Amsterdam. The successor to the original Cabinet of Curiosities, with its snakes and two-bodied goat, has given way to file cabinets of 3 X 5 cards of human characteristics. Now the two men draw out enough cards to create an imaginary person—do-it-yourself Distinction & Multitude.

Proverbs: These adages are like the precious Patek Philippe wristwatch bestowed upon the author's great-grandfather by the Heinz Company and handed down to the oldest male descendant. They range from the practical to the metaphorical—typically both at once for the discerning reader.

Revelation: Apocalyptic sips.

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A note about QR codes in this edition.

Several video and audio demonstrations have been integrated into this version. If you are using the print edition, simply scan the QR codes as you encounter them throughout the text to access the corresponding media.

The two QR codes below provide access to the complete playlists containing all of the book's video demonstrations and audio recordings.

The Complete Playlist

Scan this QR code to access a YouTube playlist containing every video demonstration featured in the book, including those for the diatonic modes. This master playlist is provided as a convenient reference. Throughout the book, individual video demonstrations are also accompanied by their own QR codes, allowing you to jump directly to the relevant example as you read.



All Diatonic Modes

Scan this QR code to access a dedicated YouTube playlist containing only the vocal audio examples of diatonic modes found on page 195.

Scripture 1

Geodysey I: "Come On."

On the second day of October, 1961, Tom Hollinger arrived at the Wells house in Glen Ellyn, Illinois—not on foot, like the morning he appeared without notice but with an invitation to walk to Chicago.

Or like the hundreds of mornings when the two friends then set off together for the last two years of high school: down the sidewalk of Cottage Avenue, then a left on Newton, a right on Hawthorn. But this time he showed up in the car driven by his tearful mother, Nora, usually the unruffled "Little General." Two years earlier, the same tears had fallen at O'Hare Airport when she and Randy saw Tom off for a seven-week tour of Europe.

Luggage stuffed in the trunk, Mr. Dudley Wells now ferried the nineteen-year-olds out of the genteel suburb of Glen Ellyn, then along the southeast border of Chicago, and finally to the Indiana Toll Road. At the oasis-restaurant he ducked in for a cup of coffee, no doubt reluctant to abandon the travelers.



His son writes this account a half-century later:

I had finished the freshman year at Maryville College, one associated with the Church (USA) and most authentically pronounced *Marih-vl* (like the state *Marih-Ind*). Returning to Illinois, I drove over to Northwestern University in search of Tom. I wanted to share my vision of a solo world-trip. As I made my way down the sidewalk, I heard footsteps behind, unvarying in pace. Certainly no one was following, but the pattern continued for a block, so finally I turned to behold that mischievous grin.

During the summer my dreamed-of exploit seemed more and more over-ambitious. At last I shut the cover of the new passport upon the one or two visas I'd been able to secure. I had never dared to ask Tom to go with me because of his commitments both academic and

personal. Then one day as we chatted in the Hollinger dining room of 646 Kenilworth Avenue—surely he didn't just ask "When are we going?"

The proposed venture widened my eyes as it blinked and crawled out of the grave. Tom's know-how helped us accumulate visas, permission letters from the local draft board, traveler's checks, addresses in New York City, Boston, and London, and a ticket to a four-person porthole in Boston. I borrowed a pair of too-spacious leather boots from my brother Greg. We never thought to bring a map, and I neglected to take an extra pair of glasses, although I did remember a stiff-cover journal. We each packed formal and everyday clothing; Tom's plain trousers were both gray, like his socks, a source of future levity.

To save up money, Tom resumed working at Windsor Electronics, his father's small manufacturing company.

Its main product was a glass globe that enclosed a vacuum in which tiny vanes turned by energy from light waves. His retrospective in 2023:

I served as an all-around fill-in line worker or handyman. Some days meant hours of sitting in front of hot fires shaping glass parts for the radiometers; some days were crawling around complicated machines replacing parts or trying to adjust the flames to soften, but not melt the glass, and to soften it only to a point of workability. Some days were just spent sweeping or hauling block boxes of material from storage to the production line. The work was hot and sometimes dirty, sometimes oily, and rarely much fun. The mechanical work was the most challenging and probably gave me skills in understanding how to fix things, which served me well in research laboratories.

"Randy":

I worked a couple of weeks for an insulating company owned by the father of my parents' next-door neighbor. At a low point in finances, Wall-Fill issued a check for an astonishing \$180—about the price of transatlantic crossing. After that, I did odd jobs and a few times stocked shelves overnight at the A&P grocery. Mainly I began a floor-cleaning business. Its capital equipment was an electric scrubber-and-buffer lent by Ellen Dunning, a friend of my parents and wife of Bill, an alumnus of Maryville College and my connection to it. Another parental friend, Jean Olsen, introduced me to yogurt just in case it was on the menu in Ubislavia. Other adults, offering common sense as their share of social capital, warned that we might not return to school.

Now, standing in the bustling lobby, we each extended a thumb toward travelers headed outside, who glanced at our boots and the pile surrounding us: bedrolls, fabric attaché cases, and one of the knapsacks with an American flag sewn on the back. "Don't bother to ask truckers," I advised, being Tom's senior by eight months; "they're not supposed to pick up riders anyway." Ignoring me, he exhorted a pair who had stopped to listen while I rushed to head off a third, apparently

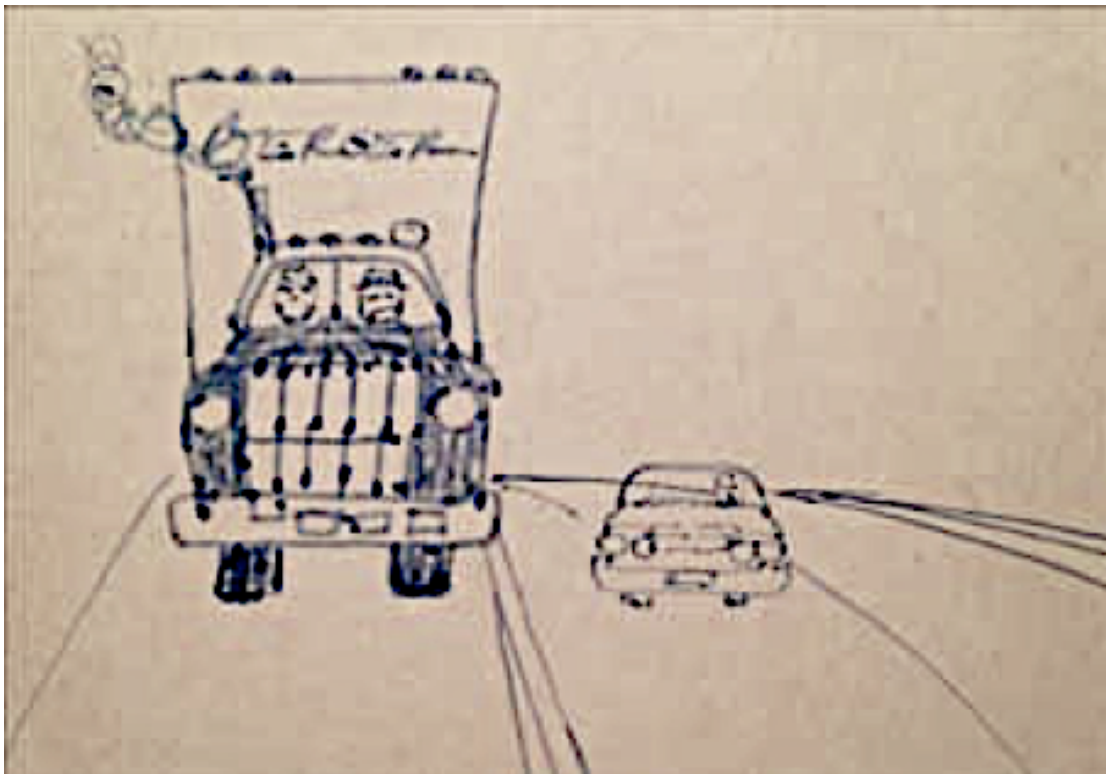


Tom: "It even works in the dark, as you can tell by shining a flashlight on it."

their ranking member. The duo, wearing workman-like clothes in contrast to my father's suit, were apprehensive about the Ohio police, and kept asking the other man if they should take us to New York City.

We stood around looking attentive. Tom and I offered to chip in on tolls, and I added that I was reputable and my mother loved me. They conferred quietly, replied "No." "OK, thanks," we answered politely and turned around toward the crowd of departing salesmen. But as I glanced back toward the far door, one of the drivers said resignedly, "Come on." I poked Tom, almost hollered, each of us now grabbing his stuff, I dropping my winter jacket, my buddy laughing, and out we stumbled. "One o' you come with me, you c'n go with either o' them." Outside I looked up to behold—not merely a truck, but an immense moving van.

First gear enabled the tractor-trailer to budge across that opening inch of Indiana far below. As the machine dragged eastward, the driver's arm continued through second, third, and on up to about fifteenth. He never uttered a word to the mum stowaway amid the roar, groan, and crank. Now the other truck labored around us as Tom waved. I wanted to swing my arms and yell, "We did it! We're off!" but still feared to call attention to myself lest the driver change his mind. Through the right-hand pane of the windshield my eyes followed the tan Corvair. Occasionally glancing sidelong at my taciturn benefactor, I could have said, "That's my father—would you mind giving the horn a tap?" But after a mile or so the car crossed leftward over a bridge directly above us so as to head back toward the city and Montgomery Ward & Co.



All travel sketches but one (noted) by author.

Scripture 2

The Estate I: "Where's Your Shadow?"

Far above the highway I gaze through the old-time split windshield at the long hood of the dump truck, a 1987 Marmon. An extinct brand, its original blue fades even more in the slipstream, its rivets strain to hold the body together, and its passenger seat gradually lowers as the air leaks, a problem remedied every so often by a screwdriver applied to a notch. Our contractor, Ms. Faith King, goes through about a dozen shifts as we head toward a mulch depot.



From the escarpment-hugging Blue Ridge Parkway looking southward to North Carolina. Brother Greg must have passed this lookout when he cycled the entire 469-mile Parkway.

A few minutes earlier I grasped a step welded to the side-borne gasoline tank, angled one leg to get a boot onto the first rung, reached for the side-handle, and stumbled off like a drunk. Another attempt brought access to the cab, which then lumbered down our steep gravel lane with an outrageous series of sharp reports from its engine brake. This was forty-eight years since Tom and I had experienced compound mobility via Global Van Lines. Now Marge and I, after a few years of traveling to the place as often as feasible from South Carolina, retired to the Blue Ridge Plateau of Virginia, the fifth colored-in-state of our marital atlas.

In southern Virginia, the Blue Ridge Mountains form this broad upland, which “rises over 500 [meters] from the Piedmont along the prominent Blue Ridge escarpment (geology.blogs.wm.edu/blue-ridge/, accessed Aug. 2022). We planned to join Greg and his wife, Vicki, who lived an hour away. One day he helped me outline the house with rope and stakes, and to our clear-cut edge we imported a great-truck-hauled flatbed-kit of thick pine logs.

But as logs were becoming structure, my apparently robust brother pedaled his bicycle up a mountainside to Beulah Land. Wit is no match for a widow-maker. He left me with sixty years of memories, one of them before he was born, when my mother urged me to feel him wiggle in her belly. Among the recollections: his role as my guitar teacher in 1963; our cat-and-mouse automobile chase around the Wyoming-Colorado border in 1967; our pilgrimages to a down-and-

out bar near the train yards in West Virginia (with a ritual pee on the tracks); and in South Carolina, our all-day hike from the R. & M. Wells house to the Atlantic, where we cooled our feet after sipping a beer. What could Marge and I do but continue living in endless absence? There was the guitar he'd taught me to play in the summer of 1963. We hung a photograph of him taken as he contemplated the landscape through the gap of the uninstalled kitchen window. But with time, "We are here without him" shaded toward "Without him we wouldn't be here."



Northeast across Epperly Mill Road
toward the town of Floyd and New York City.

For several years before moving into our new house, we made pilgrimages from South Carolina. We fondly named it *The Cabin*, even though the square footage made it a "lodge" in industry parlance. Two sets of glass doors, each under a large triangular window, opened from a vaulted great-room onto a railed deck. It served as the roof of a carport and, at 2430 feet above sea level, an observation platform that faced roughly northeastward. Below it opened to a forest that was recovering from the saw-blades of maybe twenty years earlier. The woods hid a weedy logging road that sloped sharply down to the invisible Dodd Creek. Across that stream lay a field that held a small outbuilding, then Epperly Mill Road, almost concealed by trees, then a spacious uphill pasture, then the village of Floyd, population 450 or so.

Way off in the downtown, pointing up from a shallow gap in the woods—was that the tip of a fir tree? We eventually understood that it rose from the yard of an old brick mansion on Main St. On the main corner, by the iconic lone stoplight, the words FARMERS' SUPPLY could be made out with binoculars, even to the apostrophe that was more fussy than farmy. If we looked from an exact angle we could even watch lights change from red to yellow... to green... to red....

The deck became La Nuagèrie, a cloud observatory, which also served as a planetarium to behold the reappearing moon and the sunrise, an event that ever-slowly-slipped left- or rightward with the season. The basement was a walk-in because the foundation-diggers quit trying to penetrate the Appalachian bedrock. Our 7.43 acres, I insisted with mock posh, should be called The Estate.

As for water, none flowed into the top of the Blue Ridge Plateau, just *from* it. I imagined hauling a kayak down the logging trail to Dodd Creek, ducking under the bridge that crosses Rt. 221, reaching the Little River, then the New River, then continuing north to the Kanawha in West Virginia, then to the Ohio, then bending south to the Mississippi and eventually tying up near Café du Monde for a beignet. Or of hauling the kayak eight miles to the Parkway, then—why not attach wheels and zip down to the Atlantic for a seafood platter?



Robe flowing in still-air,
girl going to no-where.

Were it not for intervening trees, lenses could have spotted a yard-statue on Epperly Mill Road. Its height was about two-thirds the length of my walking stick. The image of this female angel troubled me: her swirling solidity, her out-peeking set of toes that invited yet coldly rejected a tickle. Girl her own tombstone. Was she not two degrees removed from life? First turned to marble and then relocated to heaven? Could I whisper something in her ear to break a trance? Supposing that she could read Hebrew or Greek from right to left: how could she even turn a page, much less flap wings as she hauled the volume around the ether? “At least put the book down,” I would think, wanting to call out, “Hike with us!”

Toward the top of Annie Lane, we would hike the path close to a spine. It began extending the driveway, communal and gravel (not “tabby,” the oyster-shell slurry of the coast), just beyond our house to a pasture. In a few minutes we could reach a fence that sometimes provided a leaning gaze at black cows (a word that our friend Ralph Roe emended to “cattle”). As for directions, curves of the path denied the sense of a grid.

The low end was reached by driving or hiking down the twists and belatedly swerving to the edge of Rt. 221. A right turn led downhill again, along a leisurely curve toward Dodd Creek, past Slaughters’ Grocery and Plant Nursery, then uphill again toward The Stoplight. A left turn pointed uphill toward Willis, eight miles away, a hamlet of a few businesses and churches, the place more conception than location.

Across Rt. 221 rose a steep highway-cut. It was blanketed with the invasive kudzu vine, dry-brown for much of the year, shiny green for the rest. Then tilt your head to view a 3-D, site-specific installation: a small, unpainted barn with an enclosed shed that leaned upon its short right-end, and a metal roof with patches of hand-colored rust. One or more horses often stood at the top or balanced on the slope, and a pickup truck sometimes caught rainwater.

On Rt. 221, a driver would occasionally charge uphill in a vehicle modified, according to instructions in the sociology textbook, to increase the volume. (For males, to enlarge the deciballs.) I had usually lived near a railroad—stepping over the tracks, feeling the bumps at crossings, hearing the muted blast or whistle, even falling asleep to the chuffing of steam (all celebrated in *Along the Waccamaw*). But Floyd County offered nary a wooden tie, no slightly warped, faraway chord. Already isolated, the place now and then seemed to lack a pair of steel coordinates.

We cherished a visit from Charlotte, North Carolina, by Sidney, our first grandchild, born 2007. He got to ride in the Marmon on its loud return up the steep curves of the driveway, beaming as he stood in his dad’s lap. Determined that he would frolic on the new mulch pile, I mowed around it to eliminate the blackberry bushes. At first he was timid, but with my boosting hand he

reached the top, then enjoyed running down the sides for a while even though and because his pants collected wood-shreds.

Marge, Andrea, and I took him downhill in the red wagon, which he himself pulled much of the way up, stopping to load it with a handful of stones. I knelt beside him and pointed out a nest in a tree, then later a big grasshopper that was succumbing to autumnal lassitude. On the driveway he and I would look at our shadows, maybe wave at them or let them chase each other. “Where’s your shadow?” I once asked with a hint of urgency; searching the ground before him, he couldn’t locate what was hiding behind.

Up from the construction-imagination of the estimable Faith King and Kathleen Becker went the pole barn. This was the latest artifact on land that had been hunted, farmed, logged, and bulldozed. First the scraping of topsoil, then the dumping of fill dirt, then the ribboned stakes, the giant screw at the front of a buckin’-bronco machine, cement in the holes, eighteen or so posts, crossbeams, trusses, hemlock siding, batten, windows, electric double-doors, and wind-resistant roof. Bustling, social, and noisy was this process, with the growl of diesel equipment, wham of hammers, screech of saw, clunk of lumber, words spoken or yelled (once or twice harshly), plus songs blaring on the radio. All sequestered in both edifice and memory.

To make way for added topsoil and rake, I plucked a few hundred remnants of the Rocky Mountains of the East. Had Marjory and I not already lived upon these early white peaks? For they had eroded from bedrock to boulder, large rock to cobblestone, to gravel to pebble to sand. Entering the geological hourglass, they had emerged as the Piedmont and then the Coastal Plain, which encompassed our yard in South Carolina, its beachy patches often making me think “Snow!” Now on walks to the farm, I would rap the fence with a hiking pole before turning around: a reminder of reaching out to touch the wooden posts of Surfside Beach Pier and mark the first half of a sandy round trip.



One anomaly on the hoof. Photo by Marjory Wells.

Occasionally a rock would surprise my fingers with warmth as if trying to reptile itself. I quit plucking after a piece of cinnamon candy looked like a red stone. Then a heavy rain exposed more debris and I comprehended that this stuff wasn’t on *top* of the ground, it *was* the ground—the erosion of invisible bedrock. Still, our private Newcastle required a fresh supply for the driveway, so a truck from the local quarry dumped a load that the driver, a genial fellow with an accent as thick as his beard, identified cryptically as “57.”

Wanting to acquaint our grandson with facts terrestrial, I talked about gravity. Theory led to application. First we lifted the rock that propped open the basement door to admit sunlight; then he picked up a handful of 57 and watched it fall to the ground; then I hoisted the lad himself and

let him go, my arms stopping his descent just in time to draw a cackle of glee. We also turned over some flat rocks in the clay. Black, brown, gray, or tan, they were sometimes doubled like sandwich-bread or thin-layered like mille-feuille, sometimes flecked with gold or silver, even blue. We pulled a couple of them apart and then, to explain that everything earthly changes, I declared that stones eventually become dirt.

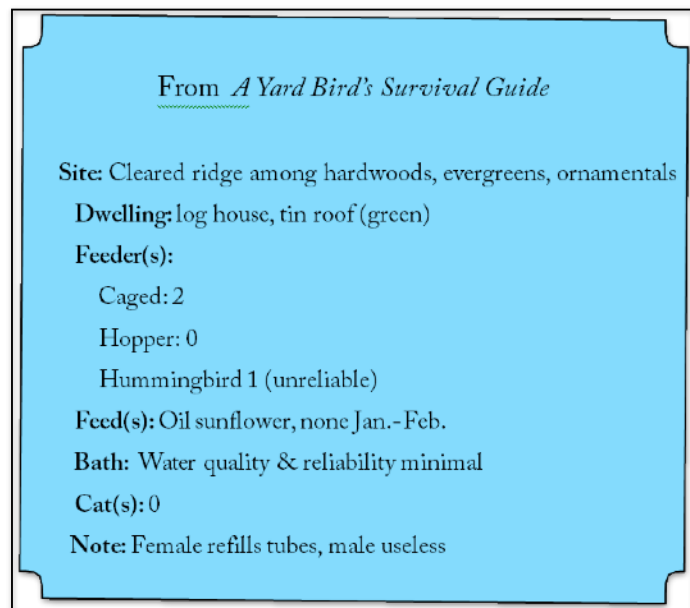
Once at daybreak, tiny green leaves seemed to levitate in the glass doors between the dining table and deck. This vision reflected the leaded-glass shade of a chandelier with its bunch of red grapes, a yellow pear, a purple-streaked blue plum, and amber twins of some other kind of fruit. This heirloom came from Sidney's great-grandfather Sidney's grandfather Sidney. This personage had owned a vessel on the Mississippi called *The Malvina*, named for the girl who would become Marjory's grandmother. The lamp's mirrored hues faded as the clouds rosied.

A subsequent dawn revealed several ranks of hills or mountains. First the dark, roughly-treetop-serrated one; then another across the valley that was lightened by mist as well as sunlight; and then a newly-upthrust range beyond and above, which slowly turned into gray clouds against an orange streak. I declined to praise Jesus despite the encouragement of my beloved childhood hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth" (1864), and despite the grandeur of the composer's name, Folliott Sandford Pierpoint.

One morning I reeled up the woven-wood-like curtain over the doors and blinked. Was God making a royal progress above the town? Through the clouds shone beacons, slightly tilted and paralleled by gray stripes that gradually drifted away. Another time the sullen, low-ceilinged doom of dawn permitted a single chirp somewhere in the woods. Once, acutely angled sunlight fell on a wild turkey that poked along stiff-legged while dragging its shadow on the gravel like a paperboy's bag.



We appreciated most of the birds on The Estate, but I sometimes had qualms. For unlike Noah's dove, they flew *toward* the ark, so the more they depended on us, weren't they the less wild? The mourning doves would scatter histrionically only so far from the hanging chuckwagon. I marveled that they had flapped their way from Cottage Avenue, even though they did have fifty years to do so. No matter how cheerful the weather, their songs were sighs. Our friend Jane Cundiff, her fingers ever on Gaia's pulse, reported that there are more and more such homeys, including crows, sparrows, pigeons, that can survive within human habitats. "Many others that require more natural ecosystems," she added, "are going extinct."



Out the kitchen window a crow poked around on the gravel next to a gigantic beetle—which I discerned was actually a regular one clinging to the screen. One gang of crows, always blowing their noisemakers, would coast wide-winged down to the ellipse formed by the front driveway. Then they would peck under the bird feeder, admirably aggressive nuisances, sinister waddlers.

One morning Sid watched as I jabbed, squeezed, and pulled up dirt with a post-hole digger. I rammed in a pole that we stabilized by putting rocks around its base, and afterward screwed a bluebird-house onto it. The box soon held a nest made partly of bright green grass, which itself soon held a clutch of blue eggs. Months later as Marge and I removed the empty beak-creation, we found a single egg, almost weightless, off to the side.

In the carport some animal, maybe a raccoon, broke the floodlights, probably trying to reach the nest of a barn swallow. The nest remained but the custodian was gone and Marge upset: "I watched you every day, taking care of your babies." We replaced the bulbs and who should return but Mama. Once we parked the car and started toward the basement door when my spouse halted to say "Well, hello!" We looked at a little bird that crouched in the doorway and stared at us. Finally Marge reached for the door handle and the visitor zoomed out of a cannon.

A black searchlight would sometimes sweep across the foliage, shadow of a winged mouser. A branch would sometimes bend under red, and look! At the apex of that tree—it's a scarlet tanager, unaware of its blazing feathers or its Portuguese-Amazonian etymology. Once I reeled up the curtain to behold a feathered jewel. "Indigo bunting!" I whispered. Dark-shiny in the faint light, it pecked the grass amid short, pinkish ground-cover and yellow dandelions, one of which it trod on and bent over. Spotting another such rarity poking around the herb garden, I thought "Poor Marge, still denting the pillow."

One day a couple of unfamiliar patrons bellied up to the seed-bar. Trying to identify them in the *Book of North American Birds*, (1) I recognized the brown-headed cowbird. It had been invited by open spaces like ours that were surrounded by woodlands. *Molothrus ater* would lay eggs in

the nests of other species, hosts that fed the imposters, which returned the favor by squeezing their young out of food and space. Like many a sociopath, this species disguised opportunism with innocuousness. I vowed to trap or shoot it, or at least get a cowbird-pouncing cat. But I feared the kudzu blunder of trying to combat changes in the natural environment by introducing an “agent of biological control” (naturalist Fred First).

An occasional meow-like complaint issued from the foliage somewhere, a sound with no modulation of volume, duration, or pitch. But this cat would not get rescued, unlike our long-ago tree-stuck Mona: one of her lives had registered as a sudden weight on an upside-down lid of a garbage can, which I held over my head while balancing on a ladder that leaned against a pine.

As I surveyed the sky at breakfast, two quick thumps! One against the high triangle of reflected nature, the next onto the deck. At Marge’s insistence I went outside with a dustpan and brush. Admiring the bird’s iridescent green feathers and dainty claws, I reluctantly noted the comic-strip X on its eye, then shoved it onto the pan, which I swung toward the treetops.

Reggie Daves, our friend and Marge’s former boss-colleague, visited from South Carolina. A bird-devotee, he wrote the names of seventeen species on the property on the back of an envelope. Now hired as a lawyer by a yellow-bellied sapsucker, he scolded me for netting the trunk of our prized Atlas Cedar to protect it from rings of tiny holes. Indeed, they didn’t prevent this native of Algeria and Morocco from flourishing. (2)

Another bird was the high-pitched chipping-sparrow, whose wee nest I was pleased to spot tucked into the Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens glauca*). Especially because I had once spent four hours digging through rocks and in snow flurries to make a hole for the tree—only to have the landscaper proclaim that it was too close to the circle driveway. My surly reaction—“*You* move it then!”—announced a return to South Carolina.



Feather of wild turkey,
Meleagris gallopavo.

The diversity of Appalachian tree species is among the greatest in the world. *Sassafras albidum* has two or three leaf-shapes, and its roots, as Fred explained, add a distinctive flavor to a once-popular tea. He pulled a leaf from another common type, sweet birch (*Betula lenta*) and applied a fingernail to the stem: “Smell this!”

Yet to augment the original abundance we hauled root-balls from Slaughters’ plant nursery, too conveniently located down Rt. 221. At last I finished spreading mulch around all fifty white pine saplings, once mere six-inch seedlings that the forester had planted as a break from the west wind. To create a surface that was

receptive to mulch, I had to push and pull the cumbersome rotary mower around them, so I first had to lop the surrounding blackberry bushes. Their stalks grew so high that a few resembled saplings. This plant crossed from the Vegetable Kingdom to the Animal whenever a thorn struck at my leather coat, or pierced my shirt to draw an “Ow!” and a fly-baiting drop of blood.

I began to differentiate two species of pine: white (*Pinus strobus*) and Virginia (*Pinus virginiana*). The former was symmetrical, branched like a candelabrum, and smooth of trunk. The latter had rough bark, short needles, and no tincture of blue mixed with its green. Virginia thrust its branches out in erratic lengths and patterns, and its trunk could have furnished a boat-mast for the Crooked Man of the rhyme. We were grateful that this species was reclaiming the steep, logged, and stump-burned hill. Another welcome opportunist was the black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), whose dense, thorny trunk was triply territorial: claim-stake, fence post, and barbed wire.



Log-igator. Photo by Jennifer Albright.

A couple of decades earlier, chainsaws had bypassed a solitary dead trunk, barkless, gray, with a few branches sticking out from its high top. It made a gaunt and even inauspicious first impression on any visitor. Yet because of its character and its service as a perch, it survived a motion to cut it down (by Marge's vote). Small birds continued to peep from it and large ones to croak "Nevermores." One day a gust transformed the top half to a log, and after this lengthy fragment spent time in a bonfire, a reptilian remnant emerged.

"Is that a holly?" As I was exploring the acreage with our son-in-law Mike, far below the old logging road, we peered through the gray-brown December tangle to behold a fountain of green-shining leaves. We made our way across the hillside to stand next to the *Ilex opaca* in admiration: no berries, a sign of monochromatic male, but robust and cheerful. Not far off, what should we behold but a tire! A black-rubber disk of incongruity, it had seemingly plummeted from an airplane.

And what's this near the driveway? A small, conic evergreen was trying to reach my knee as I admired its landscaping taste, poking up at just the right spot. It would grow and grow with the perhaps superfluous help of fertilizer and hose-water. This *Juniperus communis* protected its tiny, bluish-white martini-berries with devilish prickles. But I harvested a few and dropped them into a jar of vodka, which I set in the refrigerator and forgot.

I also discovered a sole hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). This wide-branched species was headed for extinction like the American chestnut, once a staple of the region, now as souvenir fence posts, barns, woodwork, and picture-frames. Sure enough, the undersides of the needles were sprinkled with pox-dots. So, while clinging to a steep incline with the help of saplings, and ducking around vines and branches, I inserted deep holes around the survivor by pounding a crowbar with a hatchet-head, then injected poisoned water with a turkey-baster. After a month I found no trace of the cuddly killer, *Hemlock wooly adelgid*.

As winter withdrew, the dogwoods made their debuts here and there in white gowns. I had trouble distinguishing them from serviceberries (*Amelanchier arborea*), old-time pronunciation "sarvisberries," so named because they put out blossoms around Easter Sunday. In the spring,



pinus held votive candles of new growth. While on a visit from Florida, Tom admired the sea of needles and sprouting leaves: “I tried to count the shades of green but gave up.”

I asked Sidney to help pound in fertilizer wedges around trees. Once when the plastic cap flew off and struck his face, he was shocked but resumed the job more carefully next to a subdued grandpa. The Leyland cypress, after a visit by an octogenarian who was a better Methodist than driver, leaned toward Spokane. After I pushed it upright and bolstered it with a wheelbarrow-load of dirt, it continued to prosper.

Every now and then I strolled among the trees, noting where a tiny oak had its own twin trunk that needed to be sacrificed, or where a patch of weeds could hold a sapling, or where a twig bore little glossy orange spheres. To reinforce an eroding path, I spread the lopped-off lower branches of the Christmas tree, which required all winter to fade. Mainly I labored. “I’ve given myself a promotion,” I told the carpenters, “from Unskilled to Very Unskilled.” Owner maintained Estate maintained Owner.

After a snowfall the mulch resembled a heap shoved aside by a plow, and the conifers drooped under white. I didn’t take the chance of letting the branches snap, so I hiked around knocking off the recent burden for a couple of hours of tough-love. Whap! Shake! I even throttled all the white-pine saplings while they were still littler than me. I yanked up the bottom branches to rescue them from invisibility, and I could feel them lighten as they darkened, although white globules sometimes remained like ornaments. Often I’d shake powder onto myself, and once sent ice-drops flying into my eyes. An old leather coat kept me warm and Greg’s red poncho dry, thus partly exonerating him for not helping on The Estate. Thick gloves, although soaked, protected my hands until darkness and temperature both fell. Some finger- and thumb-tips required bandages.

The first autumn a young deer rubbed some kind of velvet off its antlers onto a few arboreal transplants, simultaneously rubbing off the bark. To prevent such vandalism the second year, we wrapped black-plastic drainage-pipes around a dozen saplings. The first winter the Weeping Nootka Cypress had reason to bawl after a deer chewed off many of its drooping leaves. But new foliage slowly healed the depredation, and the next winter we sprayed it with noxious repellent and encircled it with a wire fence.

We ourselves were becoming rooted and seasoned. Instead of measuring space by backward-blurring railroad ties, we measured time by the expanding rings of tree-trunks.



Grandparents stay so child can roll.

NOTES

1. Pleasantville, New York: Reader's Digest, 1990, p. 180. Angel sets both parts of Latin nomenclature in italics.
2. Alan J. Coonbes. Smithsonian Handbooks: Tree. New York: Dorling-Kindersley, 1992, p. 58

Scripture 3

Distinction & Multitude I: Abstractions, Hierarchies, and Criteria

Hence we must say that the Distinction & Multitude of things comes from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them: and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting in one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature.

Summa Theologica, Vol. I, Part I (1)

With this vision, St. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar, aims to adapt Catholic doctrine to Aristotelian philosophy. With the series *Distinction and Multitude*, and other scriptures, Randall aims to take a partial inventory of the world's "contrary to simple and uniform." But he regards this phenomenon as secular, whether concrete or abstract, positive or negative, perhaps both at once—"Hard to tell 'em apart," said the axe to Thomas More's neck.

And he recognizes that all things bright and beautiful are subject to damage and loss.

St. Augustine, according to Thomas H. Groome, "defined a sacrament as 'a visible sign of invisible grace'"; "the sacramental principle proposes that everything in our life/world can be such a sign." (2) Can this notion be extended even further than Roman Catholic magic to include any eternal spirit? Further yet, to anything felt to be supernatural?

According to Hebrews 11:1 (King James Version), "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And verse 3: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." But *Angel* assumes that nothing earthly contrasts an apparent *outward* with an unseen *inward*. To alter the lyrics by Harry Nilsson (1971): nobody *put sublime in the coconut*.

How do people deal with the world's slip-sliding? One is by forming conceptions. We *imagine* an entity into existence, into a Let-There-Be. We create it, with culture looking over our shoulder. This power suggests that human beings, rather than God, are the agents of creation. The

series *Distinction & Multitude* assumes that the world's multiplicity emerged not from any stretched-out member of Jehovah but instead, from the cortex of Jehomosapiens. So *Manhattan* is no more real than the angels of Aquinas. As an abstraction located between the Hudson and East Rivers of the cerebral cortex, it can never be traversed underground on glimmering rails or reflected by the United Nations Building. As a concept-cocktail, it can never be sipped, despite the promise of two ounces of bourbon or rye, one ounce sweet vermouth, two dashes Angostura bitters, one dash orange bitters, and a brandied cherry.

To complicate things, a conception can be *figurative*: Jesus as “the bread of life” (John 6:35), versus the bread of (say) the Old World Levain bakery in West Asheville, N.C. Marbles can be metaphorical, and proverbs can teeter between concrete and abstract. Everything *fictional* also abides in the cortex magical. The three heads of Cerberus are held in a single human cranium, where they somehow coexist with the Three Bears and as many Musketeers. Clarence's tingling-wings in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) are made of neurons. Rapunzel is no more real than the Sorceress who is her stepmother. Even Winnie-the-Pooh is no less imaginary than *Trespassers W* (the supposed personage named on a wooden sign). The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) bandages the robbery victim and gives him the wine only of words. Hamlet's evil uncle is no more corporeal than the uncles who threaten Miss Faith Desrie in a later scripture.

A research tool called a “bibliography of bibliographies” compiles and classifies lists of publications on whatever subjects. *Srpske bibliografije* 1766-1850, lists works on the Serbian language. Why not call this world a *Plenitude of Plenitudes*?



Article 1.

Question 1: Whether a classification is based on abstraction.

In 1949 or so, two boys sat on the carpet drawing pictures. Randy pulled back the top of his friend's box of crayons and, accustomed to eight or twelve, beheld forty-eight! This cornucopia newly defined *Crayola*. Moreover, each hue appealed to the six million cones of his eyes; each became gradually defined as he rotated one paper-wrapped cylinder after another: Prussian blue, ultramarine, aquamarine, vermillion cerulean, terra cotta, burnt umber, yellow ochre, carmine—each new treasure of wax become word.

Any particular of life can hardly be understood without the general which it “participates.” Take the abstraction *cat*. Although impossible to photograph, the concept distinguishes a shape that coughs up a hairball, purrs in a lap, paws at a dangled sock, pounces on a songbird, or gets fatally distended by the wheel of a bus in Istanbul. *Cats* has over 700 pages of text and photographs, comprises eleven thematic chapters, and celebrates about fifty species. (3) But without the verbal symbol *Cat*, the chubby cheeked Chartreux would merely something experienced as if by a baby—as motion, shape, sound, texture, color, maybe a nip.

In a reversal, concretes themselves engender abstractions. So in the Templum Cerebrum, a human being absorbs enough experience with furry quadrupeds to consecrate an idea, *cat*.

An example you can't refuse. In the novel and film, the word "Godfather" begins as an honorific defining Don Vito Corleone, but when his son replaces him it becomes an abstraction—i.e., Godfatherness. Long live the Don! In the television series *Shtisel* (2013-2021), what does the title mean? Not the chain-smoking, domineering, beleaguered patriarch, but rather the extended family—i.e., Shtiseltude. Of course the Netflix "Crown" refers not to a particular, unique, golden object that weighs down a particular monarch's noggin, but rather to an idea within the heads of royals, subjects, and viewers.



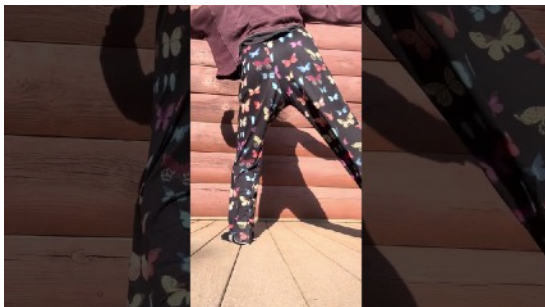
The conception Automobiles includes the once-brand-new Nissan, which in turn includes the Figaro, a model, manufactured in 1991. Each unit has a front engine, front-wheel drive, and a right-hand steering wheel (Wikipedia, accessed Oct. 2021). Concrete examples in the photo almost hide the author's grandson, Sam, behind fender five or six. (Courtesy Mr. Gary Duncan, Christiansburg, Virginia, 2022.) (4)

Plato's Republic (fourth century BCE) advances a stimulating and confounding vision in "Allegory of the Cave." Socrates, the main character, comes down hard on the sensory particulars of life. They are merely fire-cast shadows in a dumb-show parade observed by imprisoned humans. Most people are unable to escape to the sunlight, which seems to represent the intellect and its true home: abstraction, perfect and eternal.



Yet people (and other beings) indeed find themselves bound to a sensory world. In the composition on the following page, the physical representative of the idea flower contrasts with stone. The green and yellow plant, its rays formed

by close-bunched, elongated, tapered petals, extends as five suns in a rough circle, each pointing in a different direction. Even the flagstones, already irregular in shape, have treads of three slightly different planes. So it's only the shadows, delicate and complex, that make a vertical pattern within the frame.



Video: Shadow Dance in PJ's
Creator: KatieWellsEmbodied, June 2025.
Direct Link: youtube.com/shorts/r631EzJC02I



Van Gogh's sunflowers cast no shadows from their vases, making them oddly self-solar. Will there be shadows in heaven? Revelation 22:5 seems uninterested: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." But isn't this gift punishment-by-lumen? Just as uninviting as the afterlife of the ancient Near East, where the défunt lives in shadow and maybe *is* one.

Composition that would pop a pebble from Socrates' sandal.

Question 2: Whether There be Diverse Examples of Hierarchies.

Here is a simplified ziggurat of abstract-to-particular based on the entry "Dawn Redwood" of *Wikipedia* (accessed Sept. 2021).

Family: *Cupressacmea*

Subfamily: *Sequoioideae*

Species 1: *Sequoia sempervirens*,
Coast Redwood.

Member of species: This denizen
of Muir Woods, California.



Sidney's younger brother, Julien River Vasaune, eleven years old, 2021.



Species 2: *Sequoiadendron giganteum*,
Giant Sequoia.

Member of species: Seedling in a tube,
brought from California for Samuel Hope
Wells, seven.

Species 3: *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*,
Dawn Redwood.

Member of species: Tree on Wells Estate,
encircled by Virginia white pine
hawthorn, a black locust, a mulberry
sapling in a deer-resistant cylinder, and
sumac bushes.

Like the *Sequoioideae*, the New Year has
three ways of expressing itself: calendar,
solar, and lunar. Holy Trinitree.





CowParade™, single member.

Miniature figures encompass subgroups, each defined by a different criterion such as *age*, *condition*, or *artistic quality*.

How about *material*?

Resin and ceramic: Cow balancing on a sash window.

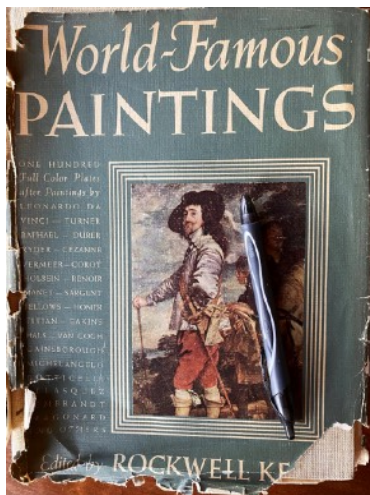
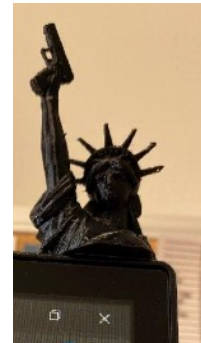
Wood: Includes the carving of a lad sleeping on a water buffalo, one of its legs and a horn re-glued (gift of Mrs. Aurel Foster).

Clay: One set “was made by a woman in a craft shop in Caracas more than 50 years ago.” The owner, Jorge Flores, estimates that he has collected between 80,000 and 100,000 figures in roughly 4,000 sets. (5)

Stone: Exemplified by the mysterious hand-held effigies of Scripture 20.

Metal: This Statue of Lib-bitty atop a computer, its gun pointed aloft. (“Why?” asked Sam. “Because sometimes you have to fight for it.”)

Rare diseases include Aceroloplasminemia; Cystic fibrosis; Tumor necrosis factor receptor-associated periodic syndrome; and Spina bifida, this last affecting the likable Chris Walters of Floyd County, Virginia. In his early twenties, he laughed when the author asked if his loud socks *reflected* his mood or *caused* it.



Edited by Rockwell Kent, a painter himself, and published in 1939 (New York: William H. Wise).

Randall was enjoying the sunshine at a plein-air restaurant in Floyd, Virginia, when he noted a tall bookcase with shelves marked “Free.” Bounding over, he spied *World-Famous Paintings*, grabbed it, handed the waitress some grateful dollars, returned to his table alongside a funky blue bus, and opened the book next to a serving of carrot pancakes. Joining him was Thomas Lister, 4th Baron Ribblesdale, 1854-1925, as painted by John Singer Sargent, Plate 98.

Does the author’s copy—like anyone’s—reflect a perfect, eternal Platonic original? If all others, with their weight and their tipped-in reproductions, are mashed together, as if to make paper, can they arrive at the essential *World-Famous Paintings*?

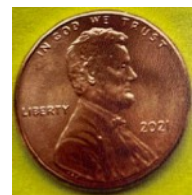
What makes any hand-held *World-Famous* unique among multitudes? The author’s has a jacket that’s tattered, a right side resembling a scroll, and a missing bottom-right-corner that reveals a patch of stiff front-cover. Between rectos and versos

were these discoveries. (1) A torn-off scrap of paper that on one side bears an *Amoco* graphic; on the other, four-and-a-half names (maybe of card players). (2) A yellowed and edge-bent sheet of typewriter paper. One side bears an essay written in longhand by Arthur G. Halloran, who commends the influence of poets on musicians; the other side (the top now the bottom) bears the remnant of a typewritten list that records nine sales in three columns.

Example: Star Hat & Cap Co.—35,000 —23,500.00—Chicago, Ill.—Hats, Field, Cotton. (About two dozen hats are pictured in Scripture 19.) Typed at the bottom of these tabulations are “Page 5” and “4 pm.” Does this compilation, with its tucked-in, never-to-be remembered mementos, fulfill Thoreau’s goal of driving life into a corner? In this instance, between hard covers. Sniff the mold.

Taking a leap from the book to the postage stamp, and then to any single gum-backed example, the Newfoundland **DO-X**. A newspaper column titled “Philately” devoted most of its inches to this tiny square, of which 8000 were issued. “Of these, 1800 were used on letters sent in the mail, leaving 6200 mint.” In the case of the “Inverted Jenny,” four stamps composed an even rarer subclass when they were printed upside down. (*The Hartford Daily Courant*. Sunday, Dec. 18, 2E.)

Distinguished from the multitude of coins is this devout penny. A secular person might ask “Who is ‘God’? Who is ‘We’? Why ‘Trust’?” For a bullet sent the President’s hat to the Smithsonian, his death abetted a hundred years of shadow-slavery, and this specimen was minted during a worldwide pandemic—when citizens who relied only on divine protection endangered themselves and others.



Author with Sidney, six years old, and Edgar V. Mitchell, Virginia Tech.

Article 2.

Question 1: Whether there is a *sine qua non* of any classification.

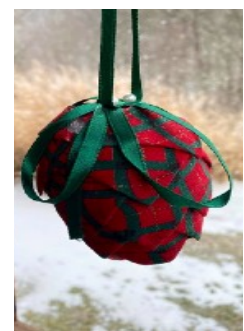
Yes: a principle of differentiation.

According to the criterion *preferential use*, handedness includes four types: dominant right, dominant left, mixed, and ambidextrous. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handedness#Types, accessed Nov. 2021.)

People in this photo can be grouped differently according to changing criteria. Age: two adults and one child.

Emotional display: two composed and one mortified. *Solar-system status*: two earthlings and one moon-walker.

Christmas tree ornaments can be classified as to size, composition, material, design (mimetic or not), era, means of production (bought or home-made), whether or not evoking a human connection. In the photograph, a stylized pine-cone, wrought from overlapping pieces of fabric, was a gift from Emily, whose thirteen-year-old fingers created it to help pass her ever-shortening time.



Branch-dipper of many a Wells Christmas tree.

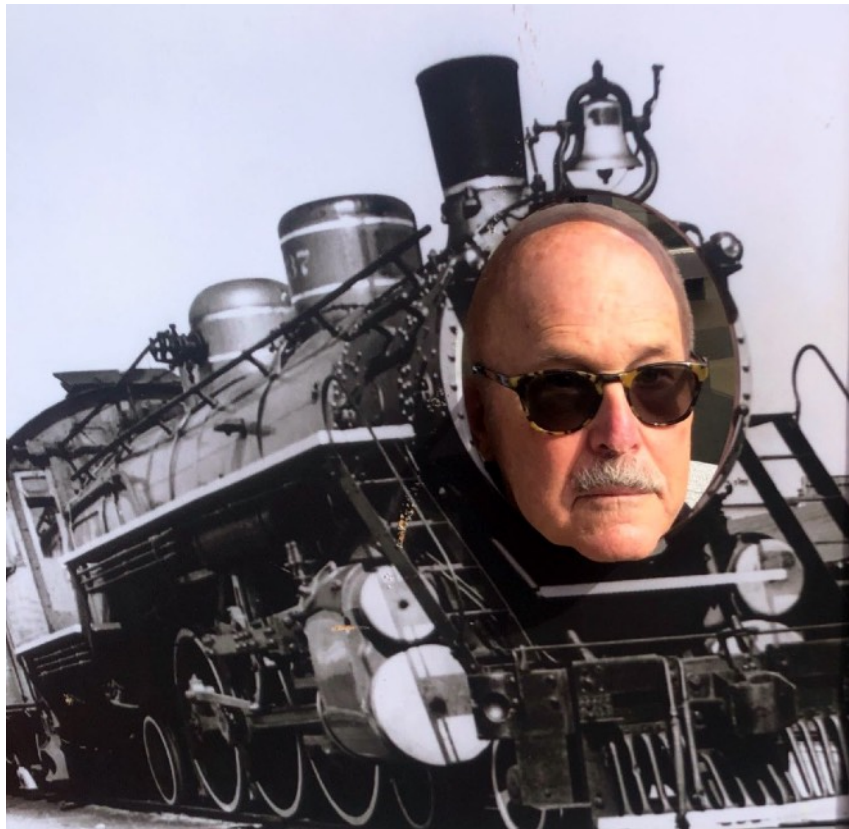


“Please, it is my intention to request for your assistance.” These words were emailed by Miss Faith Desrie to the author, who now applies them in hopes of lenience. Because trying to classify phenomena is like trying to spell *Sequoioideae* or *Srpske*. Randall pretends to no unusual command of logic but wonders at the scope of plenitude. Here goes:

Dog bites vary according to breed, level of seriousness, and physical appearance. The last includes the sub-classes of abrasion, laceration, and puncture. What about dog-deities? Does this kennel hold more than the Egyptian Anubis? What about dog-songs? The subclass *deceased* includes Old Blue, who died so hard he shook the ground in my backyard—as well as the ever-mourned, unnamed companion of Mister Bojangles’.

Now to turn a skeptical eye on “saint.” Why was Erasmus of Formia canonized as St. Elmo, the patron of sailors, but not Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf (1739-1799) as the patron of violinists? Why no Old Saint Dit? Why not admit gradations of holiness—*Saintish*, or *Faintly Saint*, or *Saint** (i.e, with asterisk)? As for sinners, why not let half-bad people spend six months each year in hell, as if in Florida? Why not let some people ride in the baggage car on “Life’s Railway to Heaven”?

Songs about trains—there are “thousands of them,” according to Katie Letcher Lyle. **(6)** Here are the author’s lyrics to number Thousands-and-One:



The Secular Express

Long-long-short-long,
That's its whistle, that's its song.

Stop, look, and as it nears,
Stick your fingers in your ears!

No need its name to guess:
Gone! *The Secular Express*.

The *Stinc'* & *'Tude*, an earthly line,
Has no station called Divine.

Can you believe, of this choo-choo
The author is the engine, too!

Coal, water, fire, steam,
Make those steel wheels scream!

Hug the rails' insides, flanges!
Whirl eastward toward the Ganges!

Long-long-short-long,
This train's earth-bound, rivets strong!

NOTES

1. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Translator. Cosimo, Inc. Jan. 1, 2013, p. 246. Google Books. Citations in *Angel* appear at the end of each chapter; or within parentheses if they (A) are brief or (B) cite an Internet source.

2. “What Makes Us Catholic: The Sacramental Principle.” 2012 Spring Resource Guide—BCShare.pdf, p. 4. (bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/ Accessed Aug. 2022.)

3. Ed. Valeria Manfredi Fabianis. Vercelli, Italy: White Star. A Cube Book. Rev. ed. 2002. (For this source the author thanks Jennifer Albright.) *Compare Classic Car: The Definitive Visual History*. First American edition, New York, 2016.

4. Author’s note. *Angel* often mentions members of Randall’s family:

Randall, b. 1942. **Marjory**, b. 1945.

Andrea, b. 1976. Sidney Vasaune (b. 2007), Julien (b. 2010), and Alice (b. 2012).

Katherine, b. 1980. Sam Hope Wells (b. 2014).

5. Eddie Dean, “His collection of miniatures from around the world fills 16 rooms.” *The Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 5, 2021, p.11A.

6. *Scalded to Death by the Steam: Authentic Stories of Railroad Disasters and the Ballads that Were Written about Them*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 1983, p. 5.

Locomotive photograph with cutout: courtesy Museum of Durham History, Durham, NC.

Author’s note. A classification based on similarities can highlight differences.

Category: *Black men breaking a rule on a Greyhound*.

(A) In about 1961, an overnight bus rolled toward Cincinnati from Knoxville. Randall had an aisle seat next to an older, slight black man, a bit roughly dressed, who introduced himself as Columbus. They shared a few quiet words, an intimacy abetted by dimness in the coach (as if candle-lit) and darkness out the window. Randall now perceived a flask rising toward him, and I accepted the offer. A whiskey communion, driver unaware.

(B) In 1977 a coach rolled through the blinding sunshine of South Carolina fields, its air-conditioning as vital as oxygen for a submarine. A passenger stood in the aisle, held to a post, and puffed on a cigarette by the No Smoking sign. When Randall pretty much told him to stop, he replied indignantly: “I always smokes on the bus.” Driver ignored the situation.

Scripture 4

Geodyssey II: Borroughing Under the City

The thick pane near my face smears with whizzing lights affixed to the tunnel wall. After they slow and cease, I get off the train, and at about 2:45 a.m., wait alone. Leaning against a trash can, I almost fall asleep and knock it over at the same time. Down the tracks I peer till they end without a glimmer of a headlight.



Subterranea was a long way from the top floor of 251 E. 51st St., Manhattan. That apartment, where Tom and I were staying with the parents of our hometown friend, whom I'll call Stan, was itself a long way from the moving van of the previous night, parked outside Cleveland next to the turnpike. The sun setting on Oct. 3 left a turquoise reflection off the United Nations Building.



City doubled by glass. Most global-trip-photographs by Thomas G. Hollinger.

Time for us to make use of the eighteen-year-old minimum age for buying alcohol. So again our thumbs secured us a ride, this time by pressing a button—down, down to street level. There we splurged on a jumbo bottle of burgundy as well as a small one of liqueur. Back in the apartment, we watched TV with our hosts and polished off the bottle, whereupon I changed from grape to banana. Calling for Tom, I looked around, and found him in bed. So I stole the neighbor's chair off the next terrace, set up a TV table for my beverage, and sat inhaling the city. Then I hopped to a little terrace by Stan's room and the kitchen. Opened a window, failed to stifle a laugh at Tom, Batmanned back. New York City was so lovable that I needed to explore it. I snuck out and not long afterward found a subway entrance, then stepped down, down, into the first train.

An escape from workaday light—such as the rays that had baked my short stint as a house-insulator. But I was again nocturnal, the locked-in stock boy during occasional overnights at the A & P—yet liberated, strangely enough, underground.

Aimless, doubly intoxicated, I got off somewhere near a place called North Park Avenue. Thanks to neon, the reading lamp of Pluto, I found a tavern and ordered a martini. Inhaling from a smoky cylinder of decadence, I sipped at the bar with a potbelly and its wife. We chatted about the Dodgers, who never should have left Brooklyn. This couple had come in to see Larry, a sometime-bartender with asthma; they had met him on their last plane trip down from Niagara Falls for the Woild Series. I agreed that Larry was indeed fun, especially during the series, and made my way out the door.

Underground again. The name “Queens” pleased me, so another vertical descent by stairs then shifted to horizontal motion via rails. Amid the roar-and-squealing speed I chatted with a genial graduate of the University of Illinois ('52) who was seeking his fortune as an architect. I assured him that I was reputable. When we bade farewell, I stepped farther down from already-down, spied another tavern, ordered a Manhattan. Had a conversation with a fellow who, every time he ventured a joke, patted me on the back, then my arm, then my leg. The old guy, moreover, kept asking me why I had trouble with my landlady, while insisting that he didn't want to pry. Long story? What is it? Oh, I don't want to pry, long story? Bartender looked disgusted, time to wobble out.

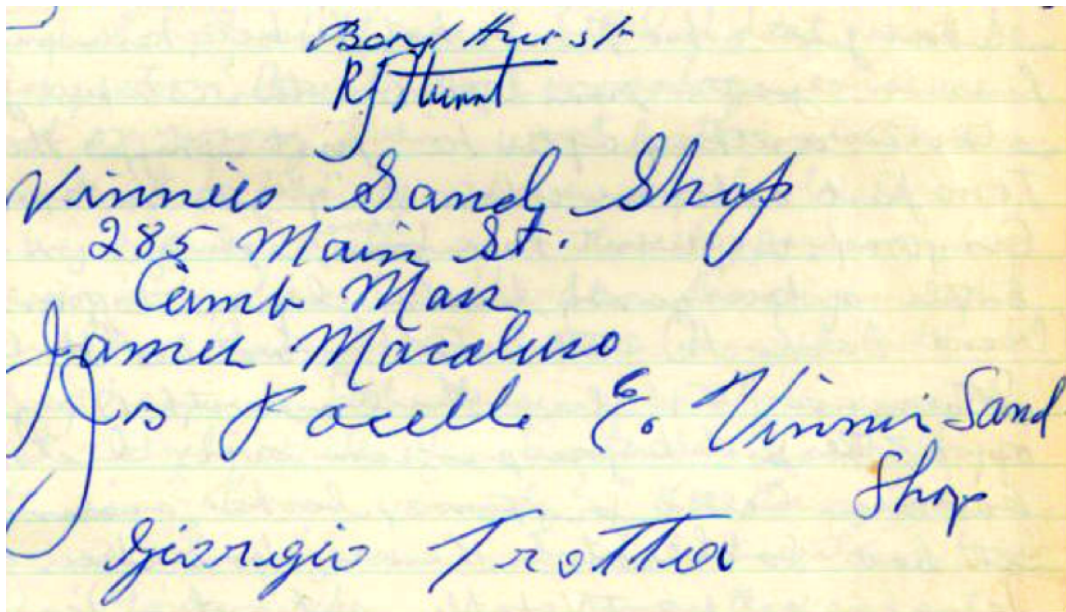
Down, down again from the emptying street. Again climbing aboard, I headed in the wrong direction, further into Queens, a blend of wherever and whatever. Back on the street, the closest thing to dawn was the approaching headlight or the blinking neon. I found a bar in time to relieve myself. Walked around a massive animal that lay right in the middle of the aisle, exclaimed loudly, “Pardon me, dog.” Customers laughed. Ordered a Manhattan, lit another cigarette (alien activity) and moments later felt a sensation sharp and unlocalized. Reacted with an indefinite gesture, sat calmly. “You all right, sir?” asked the bartender. “Burn yourself?” All the patrons looked worried. “No,” I replied with nonchalance. “You're lucky.... Be a good fellow and put that out.” On the floor I beheld my matchbook in flames and, able to rise, stomped it to smoke. Then I cooled my thumb in the antibacterial elixir and finally managed to take my nineteen years out the door.

Got to the Elevated station, where I waited for fifteen minutes, again taking a leak, this time perilously close to the third rail. Caught a train in the proper direction but got off too early. Stood on the platform another fifteen minutes. Talked with a Chinaman about Red China, doubted he

knew what it was, but urged him to hate it anyway. Standing at a respectful distance, I assured him as to my reputability. On the noisy train car I asked for his address so I could write and let him know I was OK. He told me I was a good boy and gave me his card: *Tom Shong, 239 E. 13th St., New York*. Got off at Park Avenue, hiked to the surface, messed around, decided I wanted to see 42nd St. and Broadway. Back down the steps, back on a train, back off it. Waited, waited for a transfer at around quarter to three. The trash can lurched “Enough.” So I climbed to the surface and walked back to 51st St. and the thumb-button.

I laughed out the whole story to Tom, and four hours later we awakened, whereupon our hostess called the doorman and asked him to hail us a cab. Soon the dignified, uniformed gent was grabbing my backpack and sprinting toward the yellow car that Tom had hailed around the corner as the doorman now held the straps like a big purse, his long legs pumping, a pedestrian now jamming a droopy bundle into a window.

Not long afterward we rode an intercity coach, where I reclined in a fog, thumb and head competing for attention, luckily unconscious of the earth’s slight curvature northeastward. In Boston, on the MTA, a lady on the seat behind me picked up a dangling strap and tucked it into my pack, and at Vinnie’s Sandwich Shop, the owner gave us a free submarine sandwich. We were eager to behold tomorrow’s dock before spending the night in a dormitory at MIT. So after venturing far above and far below the “woild,” we now reached its edge: wooden piers and the *HMS Nova Scotia*.



Bonghurst
Rf Hunt
Vinnie's Sandwich Shop
285 Main St.
Camb Mass
James Macaluso
Jo Facello E. Vinnie's Sand Shop
Giorgio Trotha

Signature-souvenirs, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Scripture 5

The Window: "Glass Crunched Under the Feet"



Mesdames Wells and Chambus,
Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1989.

You have watched as lights of a tunnel blurred the thick glass next to an already-blurry passenger. Have looked from on high through the windshield of a moving van and then a dump truck. Have beheld a line of ever-smaller Figaro windshields. And have beheld a striped cow poised between upper and lower panes of a casement window. Now you will experience an inventory of one human creation.

Slightly mystical, the window serves as both aperture and barrier. Although its physical expressions register upon the eyes, ears, skin, muscles and joints, it can have a metaphorical dimension—for instance, the “Broken Windows” hypothesis that links the quality of urban maintenance to its degree of vandalism, disorder, and more serious crime. Paintings and sculptures can be “windows to the spiritual world” if they illustrate the pastimes of Krishna when he lived on the earth five thousand years ago.

(1) The Johari Window (Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham) is a four-paned theory that measures personal awareness: open, hidden, blind, and unknown. Many a communicator relies on panes called Windows. Even a circular, CD can be a rectangle-framed apparatus according to its title, *A Window in Time*. (2) King Lear bemoaned the “looped and windowed raggedness” of subjects that he had ignored. (III.iv. Not all windows in Shakespeare’s time had glass.)

No end of uses for this invention: in Zelinsky’s *Rapunzel* (Scripture 18), a window abets temptation, thievery, attraction, assignation, detection, imprisonment, vocalization, and defenestration. Even a vacancy can be so-termed, as when two-year-old Sidney was playing with bristle-blocks, looked through a space, and declared, “A window.” The Hollingers’ home-made

boat (later scripture) had screen-over-space windows. In another twist, the word's pronunciation varies in English: *windoh* (influenced by spelling), *winduh* (located over the pianuh), or *winder* (with a view of the holler).

Is glass itself not an everyday miracle? Technically a liquid, it “creeps,” i.e., slowly thickens, toward the bottom at the pull of gravity. Its ingredients usually begin as undifferentiated silicates, the largest class of minerals, which are melted, then cooled before they crystallize and become a breakable liquid.

Does this process from crude to the sublime not deserve its own formal rite? One ceremony did actually exist, according to the inscription on a scorched clay tablet broken into seven fragments. It was discovered by the author in a long-buried room of the temple *M'ton-tna*, next to a heap of bricks and a demolished pillar. (Now where did I store that wooden box of hefty, clunking parts?) Randall's partial reconstruction of the Akkadian cuneiform:

Proceed under the Thrower-Catcher [i.e., the Big Dipper, so named after a variant of the lacrosse stick with its mesh open to the North Star]. **Suspend the** [illegible] **upon shoulders lined with fur of the** [animal of unknown species, perhaps the orange-coated *Hapax legomenon*]. **Slave-tended blaze, black shadow-flickers, sharp-cut-bead—gleam. Mix triune** [i.e., what glassmakers call “the batch,” perhaps composed of silica sand, soda ash, and limestone] **weighed by priestly hands.** [A lacuna at the broken edge of one fragment, probably the description of, or prescription for, a refractory pot] **upon cedar, mountain-dragged, criss-cross-stacked, sun-dried. Chant the Holy Melt** [lit. the “un-drying,” word usu. found in the context of prayer for the annual flood]. **Hail, fair-visaged, what hast thou a-cooking? Sanctify this earthly baseness** [literally “unbaked brick,” akin to Punjabi *cutcha*, figuratively “of inferior quality,” in contrast to *pukka*, “baked,” a superior building material, “superior”]. **Enter, O Tangible Invisible!**

Glass is a means of seeing *to* by seeing *through*. It can be smooth, rippled, beveled, dimpled or barred; transparent, translucent, stained, and even tinted for shade, color, or privacy. In rain it becomes a dripping scrim.

A subpar window can stimulate a rich imagination. In a series of children's novels written by Walter R. Brooks and illustrated by Kurt Wiese, Freddy is the porktagonist. He enjoys the distortion of frosty and wrinkled glass in his study because they make scenery and local animals more interesting. (3) Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, far from the Bean Farm in New York, four domestic animals peer into a lamp-lit window:

The donkey's job was to get a purchase on the ledge, the dog's to leap his arthritis onto the donkey's back, the cat's to claw up onto the dog, and finally the rooster's to flap up and perch on the cat's head.

“Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten,” Brothers Grimm, 1819, trans. author.

Clean or dirty, a window can be heated, painted, painted shut, fake, or frosted (as for a solitary-confinement cell). A stuck-on grille can make a bare sheet of glass seem to comprise smaller ones. Although many windows are sealed, others can be raised, lowered, slid, or swung—horizontally or vertically, by a cranking hand, a hooking pole, or a button-pushing finger. Arms

pulling down a sash may feel the extra resistance (i.e., from hidden counterweights that keep the window from slamming down again when lifted up). The author's gratifying memory: in 1989, when the family lived in France, eight-year-old Katie boarded the train from Grenoble to Lyon, and disappeared—until little hands appeared and struggled to raise it for a goodbye wave.

This common artifact can let in fresh or keep out cold air, or even keep in all oxygen (of a space capsule). A window can itself be windowed by an insulating pane or a storm glass. The windshield of a vehicle is a sandwich of plastic spread between two pieces of glass. Glass readily admits waves that travel at 186,000 miles a second but muffles those at 761 miles per hour. It also admits infrared waves: "How do you like my solarium," asked Miss Evelyn Snider (b. 1907). On a cool winter's afternoon in South Carolina, she sat in her car, parked near the house, reading a newspaper as sunshine poured through the windshield. A windshield can transform any car to a police vehicle when a spot of sunlight refracts upon it as blazing copbalt-blue.

Retail glass invites a passer-by to *lécher les vitrines*, "to lick the windows." It displays anything from Belgian waffles to Turkish prostitutes. Its glass can reflect the out-looker, especially when the outside is dark and the inside is light; and also the in-looker (person or bird) when the glass creates a two-dimensional Outside. When intentionally mirrored, a window can let the in-looker be undetected.

In *La Jalousie*, a novel by Robbe-Grillet (1957), the narrator spends hours peering through a louvered window to observe (or imagine) the conduct of his wife and neighbor. Indeed, framed glass is a window of opportunity for a peeper. It can even serve as a door for a keyless owner, a lover, or an intruder. It can be both a means of protection and a cause of injury (by shut or shard), and it can offer an escape from death or life. Fish dart near the transparent bottom of a tour boat; birds flap across a skylight or they empty their cloacas onto a windshield as flight records.

O Plenitude! Some windows are even interior. They can display frozen pizzas in a grocery store, goodies in a patisserie, a diorama in a museum, a newborn in a hospital, a cake in an oven, a wood-fire blazing, a set of china sparkling. Inside a restaurant in Colorado, a threesome of multiple-pane windows hangs down the middle of a room at varied distances from floor, ceiling, and one another; they attractively separate the pan-roasted giant Gulf white prawns from the spring vegetable gnocchi. Along the subway platform, recessed cases advertise products or events. Even furniture can have a window, as did the clock that was a twenty-fifth anniversary present to the author's mother's grandmother, Sophia Parker Capps. Through its tall, transparent door little Andrea stared at her brass reflection as it oscillated in the pendulum-disk.

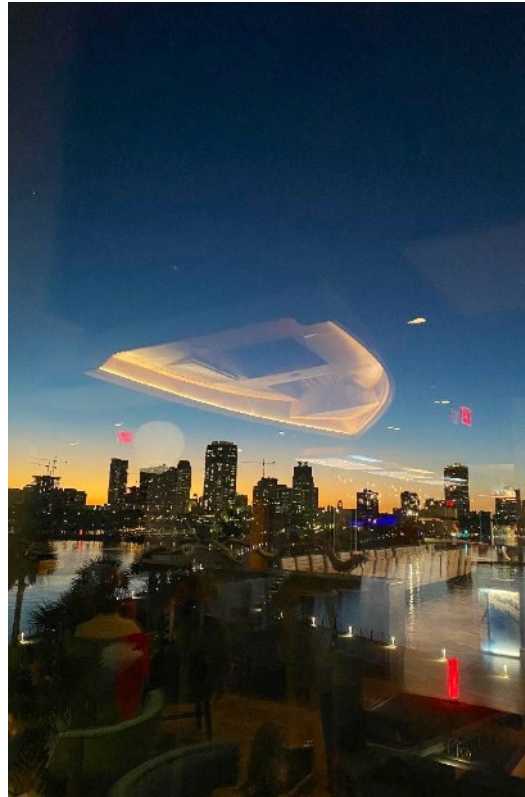
A decal on the front windshield can give access to a military reservation or a parking space. (A dog-decal stares at the



Two windows unrolled.
Costa Rica, 2022.

author in Scripture 13.); a rear windshield can honor a deceased person; either set of windows can receive radio signals with an in-glass antenna. Mobile windows? From a vehicle they turn the world to cinema, as when the pavement of the Indiana Tollroad passes beneath a moving van. Time-lapse? The porthole opening onto the dock of Boston Harbor at night encircles the dock of Halifax in the morning; the attic window of Charles Snider's house in South Carolina overlooked a noisy, lakeside sawmill until (in his daughter's time) it placidly overlooked a lakeside mansion. (4)

A commercial window can provide the backing for a painted sign. Store windows in the author's hometown celebrated Halloween by inviting children to paint on them (second prize for Wayne and Randy's piano and owl). Glass is a canvas for Jack Frost to paint with a gloved hand. A plate-glass window can verify an earthquake by undulating. Any window can record a child's handprint or flatten a nose to a gastropod.



In the photograph above, a skiff levitates over St. Petersburg, Florida. The tangible, 3-D wooden one hangs from the ceiling behind the camera. Its reflection floats in front of the camera, on the inside of the window overlooking the city. Glass as both mirror-and-aperture.

A photo itself can fly. Below, the moon and its reflection on fishing boats and a cover of scattered clouds was taken from the cockpit of a Boeing 777F near the Sea of Japan.



The window of a cockpit can also serve as an instrument screen, as in this photo. “Critical aircraft and avionics information,” explains Travis,”is presented via a Heads-Up Display (HUD). It allows the pilot to maintain visual awareness outside the aircraft by precluding the need to shift focus to the instrumentation located below the windscreen.” (By email, March 14, 2023.)



Pilot Travis extracted this screenshot from a video taken on a Boeing 777F during a stormy night over the Sea of Japan, November 2022. “St. Elmo’s Fire develops occasionally on the exterior of the aircraft’s windscreen.” (5)

Brother Dudley Capps Wells (b. 1944) earned a ticket for a seat on a plane that had only about as many windows as wings:

From December 1966 to April 1969 I flew on an Air Force reconnaissance aircraft, the RC-135, a spy plane and former KC-135 tanker. In the back section behind pilots and navigators were a dozen or more of us linguists trained to operate radio receivers, and tape recorders tuned to Russian Air Defense stations and their fighter-interceptor aircraft. Usually we would fly along the Soviet coastline 25 or 30 miles away from land, out of range of their surface-to-air missiles.



RC-135D “00362” Eielson AFB, Fairbanks, Alaska (1967). Windows superfluous when observation is electronic. Author’s brother, Dudley Capps Wells, monitored Russian radio transmissions up and down the coast.

Our plane had a large black nose containing a Doppler radar which could be aimed down to "see" what we were flying over. The pilots and navigators of course had an array of windows which for good reasons allowed them to see forward, upwards, somewhat downwards and to the left (port) and right (starboard). Occasionally a "back-ender" linguist had the chance to sit in a jump seat between the pilots and watch the takeoff or observe an aerial refueling, which was done with little paper signs and hand signals to the tanker boom operator while in total radio silence.

For the plane's glass ports, electric wave window, and a camera, please see Notes. (6)



Kreisverordnung zum Schutze des Tertiären Huglesrandes von Maisteig bis zur Stadtgrenze
Freising. June 2018. R. Wells.



Randolph St. south along Michigan Ave. Art Institute left center.
 Courtesy Jean-Pierre and Jenny Vasaune. Photo by Marjory Wells.

In this photograph the glass ignores everything but an Indiana-ward view of Downtown Chicago. The window's position on the 34th floor emphasizes the celebrated contrast between the long, high facade of buildings and the street-and-park before them. Viewing the spectacle from the north, rather than the east and Lake Michigan, it captures two sides of each building. So these edifices, flush-with-each other, nevertheless vary three-dimensionally. The oblong window emphasizes the tallness of the skyscrapers, yet because it included the scene's vanishing point, it seems to transform buildings and avenue to wedges. At the top, which the mind knows is a continuation of flatness, the skyscrapers apparently squeeze the boulevard into a narrow ramp. A framed creation celebrating architectural creations—undreamed of by St. Thomas.

In *Desdemona 2010* (above), Gibby Waitzkin framed her photograph with an antique lattice, white on sepia. This complication divides Outside from Inside, very Private from suddenly Public. The young woman's sculptural voluptuousness is heightened by contrast with the weather-worn artifact of twelve panes within a rectangular frame. Her hair cascades through several panes, and she wraps her arms around curves that press a bedsheet into radial creases. The grille also heightens the electricity and ambiguity of the eye contact between viewer and viewed. (Pigment print on Sarvisberry-blend handmade paper sealed with beeswax. 45 ½ x 30 in. All rights reserved.)



Thirteen windows onto a woman.

Through a small window near the ceiling, a statue once looked down at the author, who sipped bagged bourbon as the Angel Maroni stood upon the temple roof and blew a trumpet.

Romeo's "yonder window" is a ubiquitous feature in literature. One of Faulkner's characters holds an unofficial marriage ceremony in the attic, and afterward "a window that had been dark was lighted" and revealed the protagonist as she sat like an idol. (7) An anthropomorphic building can have "vacant eye-like" windows ("*The House of Usher*," by Edgar Allan Poe, 1839) or watch the seasons pass (*The Little House*, written and illustrated by Virginia Lee Burton, 1942).

Song? That annoying doggie in the window (pub. Bob Merrill, 1952) gets humped by Elvis's hound (1956). A moviegoer at a drive-in can watch through the windshield as James Stewart looks through the rear window of his apartment and then through his neighbor's. It's curtains for Bonnie and Clyde when they pull down a shade announcing to passersby that 'The Bank is being robbed.' And in the ballet *La Sylphide*, the hero glimpses something through the farmhouse window that foretells his ruin. The image of a window can be doubly framed—by the rest of the scene rendered and by the wood or metal around both. The Metropolitan Museum of Art even held a show called "*Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century*" (2011).

A window of opportunity opened for trashing a pipe organ:

The old Hook & Hastings was causing many problems, often playing on her own without the organist, and so becoming known as the "Hasty Hooker." Finally she had to be dismantled. The pipes were thrown out a third-floor window of the church straight into the dumpster. To help dispose of the console itself, several friends used an axe. One of us would yell something like, "This is for the time you ciphered during Margaret's wedding!" or "Remember the time you wouldn't play at all for worship?" and then take a swing. (Ann Miles, personal correspondence, 2011.)

One night the framed glass of the Wells house in Illinois served multiple functions: revelation, escape, and injury. I was staying next door because relatives were visiting, when Greg woke me up in the middle of the night after running across the yards and up the stairs. "There's smoke all through the house! We don't know why!" In slippers I galloped into the mild February darkness and peered through a squat basement window—to see grayness split by an angry flicker of orange. After someone called the fire department, my father and I ran across the street to our neighbors' garage and carried back an extension ladder, which we propped against the roof of the front porch. To the faint wail of a siren, people climbed out of the raised sash in nightgowns and pajamas: brother Cap, grandmother, two cousins, and mother, whose hand bled after smashing the storm-window with a drinking glass.

In a conflict, a window can be both cause and casualty. While living in Mississippi, I was carrying dumpster-bound garbage along the sidewalk that ran alongside the wall of the apartments. As I whistled some ditty, an explosion cracked my eardrums and blinded me with a brain-flash. Regaining balance from the other side of the walk, I looked up at barking teeth and frantically scraping nails. Consumed by shocked anger, I lifted the wastebasket and bounced it tentatively against one pane. Then a second time, noting the greater resistance and the rippled reflection from the *bonk* that I couldn't hear over the din. The third swing harder, and a shattering provoked a yip-frenzy of retreat. Cost me money, perhaps worth it. Some days later I gave the

window a wide berth but the animal rammed it to shards: “This time,” observed the occupant, “he did it himself.”



Street-train. A restored specimen rattles through San Francisco, 2021. San Francisco glimpsed through two rows of trolley glass—the larger bottom ones and the smaller upper ones, called quarter-lights.



Evidence of a soccer skirmish on the Cabin deck between child and border collie.



Broken windows can also mark the mistreatment of an entire people. On Nov. 9, 1938, propaganda against Jewish “dogs” provoked a fury of glass-smashing. Ernest Lion, the son of a decorated veteran of World War I, stole across Dortmund, Germany, and hid in a freight car:

Loud, roaring crowds swept through the streets, shouting their slogans.... Once I stuck my head out of the car to see flames shooting up into the sky. It looked like the entire city was on fire.... At dusk everything quieted down, so I left the rail car and walked into the city. They had burned down the synagogue. Jewish store windows were broken. Clothes, hardware, fine porcelain, groceries, whatever was inside those stores was now scattered around on the sidewalks. Some of it was missing due to looting and plundering. The mob had entered our homes and thrown belongings, even entire pieces of furniture, out of the windows. It was almost impossible to walk around town, as the sidewalks were filled with what was once valuable, useful material, which had now become trash. Stars of David were painted on the walls of Jewish establishments, and curtains were waving in the cold November wind through empty window frames. What sounded like snow and ice was broken glass that crunched under the feet of passersby.

After Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Windows), Ernest was rounded up with many others. Locked in old railroad carriages, they were transported to Weimar, and then marched to Buchenwald concentration camp. Surviving, he was released, only to get a ticket to Auschwitz in February 1943. So once again he became what the perpetrators called a *stück*, a “piece.” Having seen windows destroyed, he now endured them denied. “The carriages were those plump, old-fashioned, brownish-maroon, wooden freight cars with rounded roofs and tall wheels so narrow that it seemed they could not stay on the tracks.” Built to carry forty men or eight horses, according to the white painted sign on the doors, they were packed with a hundred men, women, and children. The only heat was provided by the close-packed bodies; no food, water, or windows. (8)

In November, 2001, the author dared to look through a rectangular hole cut into a high wooden fence. A smoking, twisted and jumbled mass arose four stories, the remnant of more than a hundred. burned ventilation tunnels stuck out from steel beams and fragments of concrete, wood, and glass. Windows that once looked onto the world now obscured it and would eventually top it as landfill. The tall, yellow boom of a crane picked away at the mound with clunk after clunk, humming, honking, clacking. Weeping, a woman slid past and vanished among stricken faces.



Our church had a touch of the cathedral. High above the congregation the rose window gave me a pleasure that was almost spiritual. I could look above the altar at most of the glass and half the collar into which it was set—an off-white cylinder about a yard deep that reflected sunlight already filtered by the leaded design into hues and shapes. This cast pattern was not circular, unlike the glass, but curved three-dimensionally like a magnified arc inside a Mason-jar lid. And sunlight transformed the twelve apostles, outlined in black, to splashes of color. Their emblematic objects—such as the key, boat, fish, and goblet—were set against finely-wrought decoration.

The occasion was the hundredth anniversary of the local church. Although the bishop’s homily was dramatic and engaging, I studied the uncompromisingly black Haitians, two of them refugees from poverty, the others from earthquake. I found time to admire the dark orange hair of a young woman, once a child who had squealed in glee as I pushed her around the hardwood floor in a chair with rollers. Staring at her coiffeur with its combed, thin-grained lushness, I was rewarded by a glimpse of ivory cheek. The man who read the scripture had owned an animal whose idea of public address had forced us to move prematurely to a condominium. The son of my former colleagues, once a baby, could now look down on everyone as he raised the cross at the head of a procession. One young woman sat with her widowed father, but her absent mother, so plumply-vivacious, would not see her begin college.

The collection plate weighed down my hand briefly and then eased off into the next person’s. During communion I stood out by sitting. What color is the race of agnostics? As the shaft of light slowly moved from one part of the church to another, it seemed to transfigure people. Yet I marveled that my faith had eroded to nothing. Even as a youngster I had resisted being crushed

between verses by a sacred leaf-press, or between bricks by an institutional mason. But now in my sixties, all religion—gone with the smoke from candles I’d extinguished as an acolyte.

A woman was hugging my spouse, an esteemed nurse-midwife who had delivered her child. Her husband, who had donated the window, had decades earlier lived to see another day filtered through the triple-canopy of Vietnam. The couple with whom we’d once shared a tent in a frigid state park was talking with our old friend, honored as the former vicar. An even earlier priest lauded early members of the parish for their efforts in the civil rights struggle. The deacon was once a high school girl who used to chat with me when I picked up Andrea from daycare. A sprinkling of widows, divorced people, former students.... Our neighbor and friend who had defenestrated the Hook & Hastings now played the organ to splinters.

A few weeks later I thought back on the beautifully-wrought glass with a little skepticism. Did it not co-opt nature in the service of religion? Did the many-hued glass not divert pagan sunlight to endorse theology? Maybe its circle was no more holy than the Tiffany-style shade in our Cabin that, to alter Shelley’s celebrated line, “stains the white radiance from a bulb.” For me, this was the Church of St. Secula. A worthy venue to mark the human need for meaning; the pleasure of companionship; the rite of growing up; the curse of negligence and conflict; the loss of lives natural or tragic; not to forget the pleasure of beauty and creativity.

NOTES

1. *George Harrison y el Mantra*. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2002, p. 41. Original title *Chant and Be Happy*.

2. *Rachmaninoff performs Bach [and other musicians]. A technical breakthrough in recreating music roll performances*. Realized by Wayne Stahnke. Telarc.

3. Walter R. Brooks, *Freddy the Pied Piper*. Illustrated by Kurt Wiese. 1946. Rpt. Woodstock & New York: Overlook Press, 2002, pp. 3-4.

4. The First Lady of Conway graces the author’s *Swamp, Strand, & Steamboat*, 2004, a dozen times.

5. Travis further defines the HUD. “This device rotates down within the cockpit to a position immediately in front of the pilot’s forward field of view. It provides myriad information about the real-time performance/orientation/aerodynamic condition of the aircraft (airspeed, altitude, angle-of-attack, heading, track, pitch attitude, roll attitude, Mach number, wind direction and magnitude, flight path vector, etc.).“

6. Dudley, continued. June 2, 2025.

“The only other places for linguists to see outside the aircraft were two small windows, ports really, in the two over-wing hatches. There wasn’t much to look at except that when we were in a target area near fighter bases, we would see a Soviet MiG or Sukhoi fighter accompanying us between us and the mainland. They never got very close, but just for the

sake of good diplomatic relations, we would "flip them off," and on their radio transmissions they returned the favor by referring to us in Russian as "fah-sheests" ("fascists").

"Our specialized aircraft had cheek fairings on the fuselage in front of the wing which housed an array of VHF and UHF (Very High and Ultra High frequency) stub antennas which gave us a phenomenal electric radio-wave-window into the world. We were capable of listening to and recording any and every radio signal from AM radio (kilocycles) to HF short wave, to FM/TV VHF and UHF (megacycles), as well as recording any radar signal (super high frequency). There was almost nothing in the electromagnetic or "ether" world we could not observe and analyze.

"This aircraft had two other 'windows.' In the far rear (aft) was the boom operator's window, still there after the boom was amputated. Occasionally on missions that required temporary duty at another air base, often in Japan, the boom operator pod was used to stash duffle bags, and on the trip back goods like stereo gear purchased at bargain rates. Otherwise the area and its wonderful view of where we had just come from was unused. One last window or 'eye in the sky' that cannot be ignored is the sophisticated high-resolution camera in the center belly of the plane. It viewed through a slightly curved lens scanning left to right, covering large swatches of the areas we were flying over. The linguists had no control over it and were not responsible for retrieval of film. We asked one time for it to be used when our flight encountered a formation of Soviet TU-16 Badger heavy bombers, and we wanted photos of the bombers' tail numbers, a real intelligence coup. But unfortunately, despite its superb reputation, we never had an opportunity to see any of the belly camera's handiwork."

7. William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," 1930. eng.fju.tw/English_Literature/Rose

8. *The Fountain at the Crossroad*, 1999, pp. 23-24, 40, 56. Manuscript held by the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and also available on Amazon.com. R. Wells and Suzanne Thompson were honored to help Mr. Lion ("Ernie") write his autobiography.

Scripture 6

The Estate II: "The World Ball"

The tree that could once be seen barely poking above the downtown had grown since the South Carolinians arrived, its top now suggesting a spire, and across invisible Main St. from it had risen a conical peak.



Former white-pine seedlings.

In temperate weather, we could glance outside to confirm that we were sharing our basil, rosemary, parsley, and mint. Sometimes we would yell at the hairy interloper and turn the window to a drum; sometimes when we opened the basement door, the critter would dart down the hill. Admiring its self-reliance, we regretted its vulnerability to dogs. But we also objected to its chew-marks on the door of the shed, and Marge declared that it was “up to no good” near the barn. Once, unimpressed with our approaching car, it departed with reluctance. Ambivalent ourselves, we nevertheless started calling it “Groundy.” We were actually relieved when it reappeared after the winter, but was this one *ours*? “You can tell,” said Marge, “by its sweet breath.”

Eventually random rabbits twitch-nibbled here and there without danger of ending up in a savory pie like Peter’s dad. I once flung off the cover of the barbecue grill and stared into the popping

eyes of a field mouse that stood shaking in terror. I myself was startled by its reaction, more anthropomorphic than any Mickey. Before I could whisper “Sorry,” it was gone. Months later it probably ventured back to chew a hole in my leather work-coat, which covered the cistern pump during a frost.

Near the shed, in front of the basement door, stretched a glossy strip of new tire a yard long. Or was it an oversize strand of licorice? We halted in admiration and watched it ripple slowly away in the direction of its flicking black tongue. A more positive encounter than Fred’s when he came upon a blacksnake with two pairs of eyes, one of them a frog’s.

“Rand!” whispered Marge, “come quick.” We tiptoed onto the screen porch and she pointed at the gutter over the stairs: clinging to it upside down were tiny legs. It was gone the next day, perhaps able to squeeze in with the crowd upstairs. Although these flying mammals caught insects with their nocturnal wing-nets, bugs in turn caught bats. A few six-legged parasites lay around dead or dying on the floor, probably dispatched by chemicals that the exterminator had aimed at flies and ladybug-lookalikes called Asian beetles, which had been introduced long ago to counter some pest. Wham! Wham! Marge hit the upstairs window frame in an attempt to evict the bats, suspended squatters, from their daylight home between trim and logs. Once as evening fell on the deck, a piece of trim around one of the triangular windows detached itself and zipped away as a black flapping.



I decided to extend our yard to the trucked-in gray birch. Although the heavy lawn-mower was advertised as self-propelled, the self was me. Leaning into it, I jabbed out a circle from the even taller tall weeds around the papery trunk. Clack-a-crunch! The engine stopped. I pulled back the mower and looked down to see—what was it? A manufactured object? A twisted integument? I remembered decades earlier when my rotary mower had made garter-snake purée, but this shred of hide was too broad. Then I perceived claws and the corner of a shell around a scrap of red flesh. I was mortified and a bit sickened.

As time passed, I wondered if I should tell Sidney about this ill-fated reptile. I did want him to understand that world-ball rolls through nasty stuff. Finally I decided to risk erring on the side of truth. His reaction was distress that included repeated demands for explanation, making me feel bad but not wrong. Yet I still felt guilty about sacrificing wildlife for aesthetics. A year later when I spotted a dome on the cut grass, I gratefully admired its hieratic inscriptions, then watched the animal’s neck rise from its grassy snack and its left eye regard my greeting with hauteur.

Deer sometimes favored us with a tableau of browsers. With their lean leather, did they not resemble the offspring of mules and greyhounds? Every few seconds they looked up in tail-switching vigilance, their ears horizontal as if pulled by strings. With a start they’d run off as if bounding over the moon with its gravity five-sixths of the earth’s. Or they’d stay put on the lane and stare at our car: “What year Subaru?” Or they would scatter haplessly before it in daylight, dusk, or dark.



Meet you at the pencil holly.

The proliferation of this species was largely the result of humans, who had killed off their predators (especially wolves) and created an ideal environment of woods-bordered spaces. Fred and Ann had to construct a fence around their vegetables that prevented the deepest dig-under or the highest jump-over and that lacked only guard towers. One writer reviewed findings about the deer's threat to agriculture and declared that "doing one's own killing [is] the most ecologically responsible way to live." **(1)** When our visitors from South Carolina shot a buck and dragged it uphill to a trailer, I imagined the animal's last words: "You can't hunt on Sunday!"

A buzz of flying stingers caused Marge to scrutinize the restored branches of the cypress. She discovered a puffed pastry with its own teeth inside to eat itself: a hornets' nest with rows of tiny combs. "It reminds me of corn-on-the-cob." Before you could say *anaphylactic*, pressurized poison streamed from afar. Whenever we tromped around outside, we had to reckon with bloodsucking acarid arachnids (easier to say "ticks"). Our means of defense included sprays, intimate inspections, and tweezers. Again we regarded the deer with some apprehension. "Rats on stilts," as Fred called them, and we had to be wary of Lyme Disease, the Bambonic plague.

One day I sat on a bench lubricating my work-boots with a rag-full of neat's foot oil, the rich smell taking me back to our childhood basement with its shelf of hardware-store cans. I would never leave boots outside for fear they would shelter a spider, especially one that's husband-powered. Then into my view came a daddy-longlegs that prospected around the floor of the carport. When the white tuft of a thistle rolled at him, he sashayed gracefully around it, reminding me of Gulliver and some close call in the land of the Brobdingnagians. Insects found

our place uninviting, though, because we had established a chemical moat filled regularly by a guy with a canister.

In the nearby sandbox, my brother Cap, visiting from Minnesota, sculpted a large turtle for Sid—complete with beak, flippers, tail, and inscribed shell. But when I peeled back the plastic cover another day, a colony of ants scrambled to transport little white things out of the sunlight. “Eggs,” declared Marge. Slugs, orange and moist, festooned the dirt on the edge of the boards and rubbed their eyes at the glare. Upon the cool skin of a toad I laid a finger and invited my grandson to do the same.

Exclaimed the lad, “A *calipitter!*” Indeed, a turgid, green, articulated tube crawled along a fieldstone stair-step in a rare conjunction of animal, vegetable, and mineral. Monarch butterflies with their delicate orange pennants flapped in their own wind. Our carpenter enjoyed telling me how they love dog feces. So he rubbed my face in the investment of nature with sentimental notions like Mother Earth, My Father’s World, Wakan Tanka, or even Wordsworth’s “still, sad music of humanity.” Nature: wasps, amoeba, and all.

We produced our first batch of kitchen compost and spread it around Marge’s flower garden. Much of it had spent the winter frozen in a plastic drum. Handfuls of clay had merged with vegetable scraps, shrimp tails, eggshells, the odd tortilla, and novel coffee-bean blends such as Costamalan, Ethiombian, and Rwaiian.

My lower back could take a fair amount of strain because surgery had amended the disk herniated by that Samsonite Library. I finished hauling brown dirt from the trucked-in hill behind the pole barn to shallow places in the yard. Because the hill-climbing, shovel-wielding, and barrow-pushing made my knees hurt, I limited myself to six loads a day. Once I was proud of myself for not adding one more batch, two at most, but then I bought four 50-pound bags of denatured cow manure, hauled them from the car, and spread them around the filled places. More exercise came when the wind tumbled empty plastic bags down the ridge without catching on the spines of one of the hawthorn bushes that had settled there.

I hauled water, too, from well to tree via the kitchen sink: before washing the dishes, I would turn on the “hot” spigot and trap the still-cold in a kettle until the water warmed up. Then I would carry the vessel outside—preventing a spill with the collaboration of eyes, spindles, Golgis, butt, and a screen door that Tom had rigged to stay open when needed. I would favor the pencil-holly or the conical evergreen called a “dwarf-something,” a name ill-suited to a gigantic carbon sponge.

Every so often we discovered a new species of tree. Fred identified the *Hovenia dulcis*, which seems to have originated in Asia but has invaded Brazilian tropical forests. When dried, its fruit (which the author prefers to call the fleshy rachis of the infructescence) looks and tastes like the raisin, the tree’s common name. We were pleased to own a cucumber tree (Fred again), named for the color and shape of the unripe fruit. We were happy that an olive tree had invaded the woods but made sure that its silvery-green evergreen leaves extended only from the growing, brushy branches of a single homesteader.

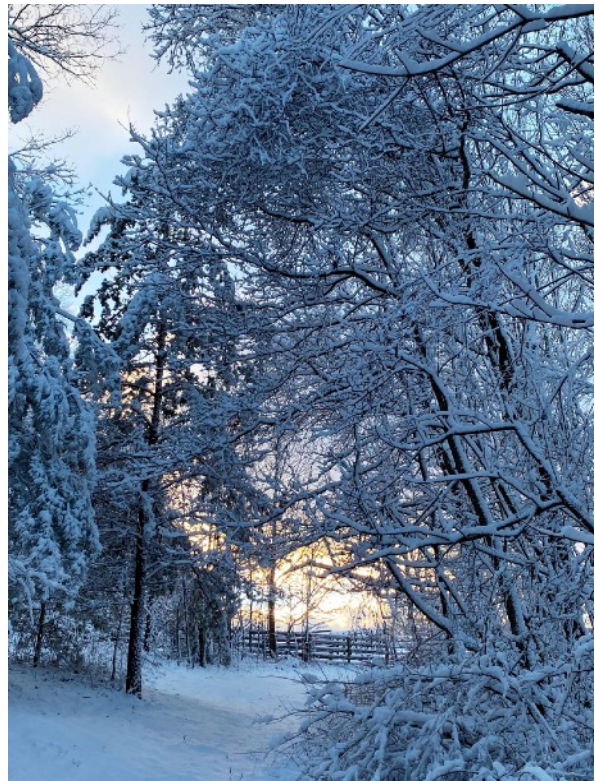
In winter we retirees took a late-afternoon hike to the unknown farmer's end of the lane through a tunnel of snow-bent pines. The sky-cover was dissipating and, in what must have been the southwest, against pale hues, clouds whipped like smoke. The blaze itself was a yellow disk upon the arc of a hill that doesn't exist in the leafy summer.

Another hike revealed imprints of animal wanderings, especially those I peered deep into and saw two-toed impressions lined by blue shadows. What about that strange pattern atop the white? "A wing-dragger" explained Dennis. Shortly after traversing the icy whiteness with Sid, his grandma returned with a bloody scrape on one side of her nose. Shaken but grateful to have all bones intact, she forbade me to venture out.

But soon two generations tested different modes of walking—atop the snow or in frozen boot-tracks, each kind a challenge that the boy enjoyed. I tried to pull him over the surface by holding his arm, but he twirled and fell, then did the same on purpose. He wore a pink jacket, red mittens, and a knitted hat that represented a dinosaur, although sparkling hazel eyes below the yarn-line diminished the threat. We set out on a quest to reach the pasture fence and a special tree. Although we tried to follow the outline-encrusted ice-prints, whenever I shifted my booted weight onto the snow, it gave way in two or three rapid crunches. I held one of Sidney's hands as he pointed with the other to a boulder partway down the side of the ridge, obscured by brush, darkly wet, a symbol in search of a novel. Happily we labored on, chatting. "Where are the cows?" Would they be there? "Maybe kept inside." A couple of times I pointed to the fence 'way through the trees, and we finally reached the end of the path. "Look for the tree with things hanging from it." With my help he made out the random, long, skinny brown pods that hung toward the snow. I pulled one off, then lifted him so he could do the same with a big smile.

Trudging back, we stopped a few times so my companion could poke at some snow-ice and offer me a bite of it, again beaming: "What kind of ice cream could we make?" By the time we reached home, the dairyman was in my arms and the souvenir in my pocket, although by then the husk had fallen open and the inner string had unraveled. A handbook identified the tree as a catalpa, which would become a locust by the time I visited Colorado (Scripture 16).

One night a smear ran from one edge of the cold celestial vault to the other. Although Marge deemed it the Milky Way, I scoffed, attributing it to some kind of a rogue cloud—until I aimed the binoculars and beheld the inconceivable carbonated galaxy. Another night we studied the horizon in search of an imminent lunar eclipse. As we gave up and turned away—had one of us noted something? That dim eeriness... in line with a cluster of amber street-lights across the



Light at the end of the Hiemal Tunnel.



Riding high in the glass triangle.

valley.... Rounded like the tip of a fingernail, it now seemed alive, to grow higher and bigger. In a few moments it became a red-orange egg with one half darkly concave, the negative of the earth's North Pole curve.

At other times the moon surprised me as to when or where it would appear. Certainly I was more informed than little Andrea had been as a child when she pointed behind my shoulder and exclaimed, "A moon." But wanting our grandson to have a better awareness than mine about the earth's nightly upside-down spin, I explained that the sun doesn't rise, but instead the "world ball" carries us in a circle until we view the morning. As for the earth's shape, I had earned an almost proprioceptive feel for it.

As spring turned to summer, the hand-coloring on the little barn uphill from Hwy. 221 began to fill in more vines. They spread greenly onto the vertical, randomly-gray board-and-batten wall; by July they had come astride the rooftop from the opposite wall; by August they had crept a third of the way down the Annie side. Everywhere in nature, the more rain, the more green. One year, ample precipitation rendered the cistern a wet elephant.





The solstice blaze-rises over the northeast corner of the deck.

To begin the longest day of the year, four pines across Epperly Mill Road cast long southwesterly slope-shadows on the pasture, newly cut for hay. By the final month the sun rose far to the south while getting a tan in Miami.

On the twenty-first I vowed to witness the advent of the shortest day, but the sky was unable to throw off its gray blanket. I had given up when the world began to lighten, slowly yet quickly. A hint of rays emanating from somewhere above the faraway Atlantic Ocean revealed patches of thin cloud that streamed toward the southeast as if being sucked into a vortex. For a while Marge and I stood peering at the glow through branches either needled or naked. Was that hump a mountain or a cloud-bank? Taking out the binoculars, we peered through desultory snowflakes at what seemed to be a glow without a source. I had pretty much conceded that this was the best we could hope for when—"Look, Rand, there it is!" Through two lenses and between two pines shone the top of the orange disk.

One night the temperature fell to 10 degrees as silver clouds rushed in from the north beneath the moon. The hum of the blower on the wood-stove, our biomass supplement to house-heating propane, could not muffle the roaring wind, and we could feel it try to jimmy the kitchen window. So I stuffed the perimeter with foam rubber pads, a piece of cardboard, and a long, green scarf. When I couldn't find my gloves, I realized they made up part of the weatherizing material. I emailed a photograph to Fred, who commented: "You guys pull out all the stops when it comes to professional insulation—not to mention pillow stuffing, beach towels & the mattress pad from Grandma's bed."

Icicles that braided the deck-railing melted to the wires underneath, which were dotted with colored mementos of Christmas. Marge urged me not to tread on the very ice I intended to whack from the firs, and this time I obeyed. As wet drops plummeted and the temperature edged above freezing, the evergreens gradually threw off subjection, their branches unbending and even flouncing a little in the wind. The pencil holly, having earlier collapsed under ice into a pile of green shavings, could once again be held between a thumb and finger raised toward it from the warm side of a bedroom window, as if by an artist gauging relative size.

On the deck the wet planks gave no hint of the two-foot drifts that we had recently tossed off in stages. "I love to shovel snow!" Marge had declared as she burst into the house with rosy cheeks. "I would make a game of it—I wanted to see how far I could throw the next shovel and just see if I could get farther over each time." Once I chopped ice and snow in front of the pole-barn doors with an axe, then shoveled off the chunks, to hasten melting and gain traction for the RV. The exercise felt good for the first half hour, but I swung, bent, and hefted so much that the next day Marge had to take extra spells of driving as we escaped to Florida.

There we moseyed even farther southward on the St. Johns River, up-current aboard the *Penelope*, Tom's condo-like tugboat. By contrast to the long-ago river cruise, I no longer bummed cigarettes and my pal was the captain. Now a professor at the University of Florida—Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, College of Medicine—he was also an acclaimed teacher. The three of us puttered upstream and down-south in quest of spring, whiling away the hours pleasantly and celebrating my sixty-ninth birthday by emptying wine-glasses.

Upon our return to the slushy Virginia hill, we learned that two more snowfalls had kept people isolated. A member of Marge's church reported that she hadn't been into town for so long, she'd forgotten how to talk. Once again a long white cushion swelled over the deck, matte in the shade of an afternoon already two-thirds of the way to the vernal equinox. To speed the melting process, I shovel-scraped a prone angel in front of the double doors of the pole barn.

Whoosh becomes a whistle and groan as flakes speed horizontally past the Cabin. At the creak of a beam I almost expect the structure to roll a few degrees as remembered-wind whips salty droplets through the rigging of the HMS Nova Scotia. The great waves rolled us starboard, toward Epperly Mill Road, and the deck leans back into the valley before the next one threatens to o’ertop us. To keep my glasses on I hold a rubber band attached to one plastic bow as, with Tom and a girl from Canada, I stand next to the railing and watch the big ones roll in. We yell over the gale and then weave all over the deck in search of vantage points. Standing askew, our hair flying in every which way, we laugh at each other when into the railing we stumble. One night we watch the gleam of a lighthouse, maybe off Newfoundland, the only thing visible except for the white foam nearby. The beam descends far below us... then slowly rises, up, up, up into where the sky would be. “As high as the moon!” someone screams. Then down it plunges like a falling star onto the sleeping town of Floyd.



NOTE

Jim Minick, *Finding a Clear Path*. Morgantown, WV: Vandalia Press, 2005, p. 153.

Scripture 7

Distinction & Multitude (D & M) II: Countables

The Secular Express charges deafeningly through Plenitude. It warms steel—horizontal with circular, it rattles the ballast, and into the welkin it expels turbulent black clouds of analysis. Its drive-wheels are powered by Aquinas' grammatical mood—the speculative subjunctive—and by the Scholastic style—methodical, analytical, chugging whether by whether. Now it calls at the town of Countables.

Question 1: Whether a human-made list enhances plenitude.

“You are to note, that there are twelve kinds of artificial made Flies, to angle with upon the top of the water.”

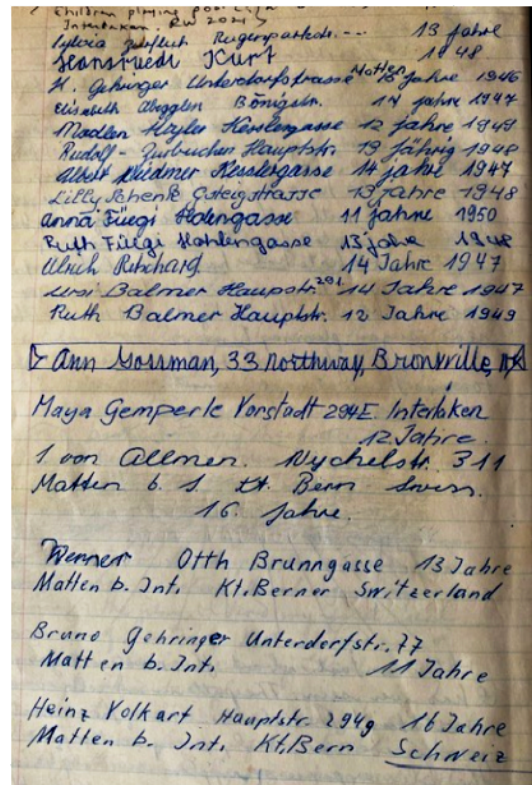
Izaak Walton, in *The Complete Angler* (1653), recommends these hand-made devices, flies, as necessary for trout fishing. They illustrate plenitude by their niches on the calendar and by their composition: various organic materials, mainly parts of insects, birds, and fowl. To his companion, the hunter, he notes that the fittest season for using these devices is a blustering windy day, when the waters are so troubled that the natural fly cannot be seen, or rest upon them.

The first is the dun-fly in March: the body is made of dun [dark] wool; the wings, of the partridge's feathers.

The second is another dun-fly; the body, of black wool; and the wings made of the black drake's [the male of any duck] feathers, and of the feathers under his tail.

The third is the stone-fly, in April: the body is made of black wool; made yellow under the wings and under the tail, and so made with wings of the drake.

The fourth is the ruddy-fly, in the beginning of May: the body made of red wool, wrapt about with black silk; and the feathers are the wings of the drake; with the feathers of a red capon [castrated cockerel] also, which hang dangling on his sides next to the tail.



Eighteen signatures of those frequenting the billiards room of Balmers Hostel, Interlaken, Switzerland, November 1961.

The fifth is the yellow or greenish fly, in May likewise; the body made of yellow wool; and the wings made of the red cock's [the male of a domestic fowl] hackle or tail.

The sixth is the black-fly, in May also: the body made of black wool, with a yellow list [band] on either side; and the wings taken off the wings of a buzzard, bound with black braked [weed?] hemp. The seventh is the sad [dull] yellow-fly in June; the body is made of black wool, with a yellow list on either side; and the wings taken off the wings of a buzzard, bound with black-braked hemp.

The eighth is the moorish-fly; made, with the body, of duskish wool; and the wings made of the blackish mail of the drake.

The ninth is the tawny-fly, good until the middle of June: the body made of tawny wool; the wings made contrary one against another, made of the whitish mail [flexible covering, armor] of the wild drake.

The tenth is the wasp-fly in July; the body made of black wool, lapt about with yellow silk, the wings made of the feathers of the drake, or of the buzzard.

The eleventh is the shell-fly, good in mid-July: the body made of greenish wool, lapt about with the herle [herl: the barb or barbs of a feather] of a peacock's tail; and the wings made of the wings of the buzzard.

The twelfth is the dark drake-fly, good in August: the body made with black wool, lapt about with black silk; his wings are made with the mail of the black drake, with a black head.

“Thus you have you a jury of flies, likely to betray and condemn all the Trouts in the river.”
(1)

The following catalogue of animals was surely chanted during the ritual sacrifice of the *Hapax legomenon*, Akkadia, 24th-23 century BCE. Trans. author.

Neither turkey nor pig
Goes moo or meow.
No hoot, hiss or woof
Shaves the tongue of a cow.
Only the bubble-fish *
Beckons the oars and prow
To the angler's wish.
The shaggy-humped yak
Doesn't twitter or quack,
And the crow doesn't coo,
And the bat doesn't neigh.
Beasts all obey,
Mouselings or big,
Under the roof
Of the earthly ear-zoo
Of the god Enkidu.



Sun and nine planets,
before Pluto was demoted
to dwarf. Courtesy Andres,
Arenal Manoa,
Costa Rica, 2023.

Ancient Greek rhetoricians compiled an inventory of stylistic flourishes—i.e., departure from the merely functional in speaking or writing. Examples fall into two groups:

(1) **Schemes.** These include *inversion* (“The actualities of life/ Aquinas did ignore”); *exclamation* (“Leapin’ ministers!”); and *chiasmus* (“Of accent Brooklyn, Buddhist of outlook”).

(2) **Tropes.** One common figure is the *simile*: “Life is like a mountain railway.” Another is the *metaphor*, such as “a train wreck,” suggesting a massive disaster. (in this example, metaphor merging with *hyperbole*). *Synecdoche* provides the nickname of an iconic French car, “Deux Chevaux”—two horses—by association with only one part of the vehicle, the displacement of its cylinders. (A legal measurement in the service of taxation.) In one of those Citroëns, more sturdy than speedy, a priest drove Tom and Randy to meet his mother in Arras, Northern France. Among these figures of speech, some verge on the exotic. One is *hysteron proteron*—the inversion of a chronological sequence, such as “Flee and turn the page!”

Question 2. Whether tallies can be either secular or sacred.

All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.

Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848.

Even though creatures can not feasibly be numbered—unlike the 150 special license plates in Virginia, the twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the 200 bottles of beer in the refrigerator-installation—“all” means “subject to counting.”

Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* (1741) has thirty-two variations of the original “Aria” (“Air”). The Pont du Gard, a creation of the Romans, can be defined to some extent by numbers: height 48.8 m (160 ft); longest level 275 meters; five tiers in the water; and formerly carried an estimated 40,000 m³ (8,800,000 imp gal) of water a day over 50 km (31 mi) to the fountains, baths and homes of the citizens of Nîmes; and the precision of its construction allowed an average gradient of 1 cm (0.39 in) per 182.4 m (598 ft). (Mainly *Wikipedia*, accessed June 18, 2023.)

Cardinal and ordinal numbers in holy scriptures?

Quantity: Methuselah surely lived for not 968 or 970 years, but 969. Ten Commandments; the Twelve Tribes of Israel; twelve disciples; “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the Second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day All the fountains of the great deep burst” (Genesis 7:14); twelve gates to the city, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles; the Christian three-in-one of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (mathematically mysterious to Islam); 613 commandments in the Torah.

Dimension: God specified that the ark should be 300 cubits long, 50 cubits broad, and 30 cubits high (Genesis 6:15).

Duration: “For in seven days’ time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:1). Jesus spent forty days in the desert, then three in the tomb between crucifixion and resurrection. Forty-two months will lapse between Armageddon and the Second Coming (Revelation 11:12). And if the Third Temple is ever to procure a replacement red-heifer, the animal must grow to two years and one day of age. (*End Time* March/April 2002.)

Sequence: the Second Coming, the Third Temple, and the Fourth Beast of Daniel 7:23.

Testimony of three witnesses, then eight (Scripture 21). And there is the traditional three-legged stool of the Anglicanism: equal reliance on Scripture, Tradition and Reason. (For extra stability, one minister added The Pension.) Ashtagraha names the Vedic conjunction of eight planets.

Ninety-nine wooden steps up to the YMCA in Istanbul. One-hundred plates in a collection of famous paintings. The author’s raindrop-count of 173 and his friend’s bird-count of 17. “The Claw” boasts three joysticks and thirty plastic coins. You have been pleased to learn that a mile of track has 3250 ties and that the R & M Wells Cabin hugs a ridge 2430 feet above sea level. The author broke tooth #16 (third molar). An incompatible pair consist of B436265 (passport) and 11 122 42 91 (Selective Service). How many supposed sayings of Jesus are there (1500) and how many color-coded rankings of his supposed words (red to black)were used by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar (Scripture 14)?

Please check the more dramatic series of Beethoven’s symphonies:

(A) ___ 1, 3, 5, 7, 9. (B)___ 2, 4, 6, 8.*

The 260 Prime Ministers of the Fifth Republic leap to mind **(2)**, as well as the 22 verb forms in French. Another French group: towns that have names ending in *-ac*. (From Latin *-acum*, probably from the Gallic *-acos*, “the domain of an owner.”) Please circle the outlier in this alphabetical list: *Arsac, Aunac, Aurillac, Auvignac, Balzac, Bergerac, Blagnac, Chenac, Cognac, Diclofenac, Gaillac, Granac, Hiersac, Jarnac, Langeac, Mauriac, Mérignac, Néfac, Rouffiac, St. André-de-Cubzac, Sameac, Souillac, and Virac*. (Thanks go to Véronique Seiler.)



How many states in the U.S.A. Indian names? Men’s? There are 871 paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, excluding watercolors, drawings, or etchings. **(3)** The herbal liqueur Chartreuse is said to be distilled from 130 herbs, plants, and flowers, along with secret ingredients and a wine-alcohol base. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartreuse_\(liqueur\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartreuse_(liqueur)) accessed 27 March 2024.)

With their uncompromising and soul-free neutrality, numbers can shift from measuring creation to measuring destruction: “The first transport of Jews to Auschwitz was 997 teenage girls.” ([washingtonpost.com/history/2020/01/27/first-transport-jews-auschwitz-was-997-teenage-girls-few-survived](https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/01/27/first-transport-jews-auschwitz-was-997-teenage-girls-few-survived/)). **(4)**



From musical to tectonic: there are fifteen principal earthly surface-plates. The sewing machine above offers 208 stitches, including straight or zig-zag (Husqvarna Viking Opal 689 Q): In the photo on the next page, one of six types of corn pops to life after Grandpa scattered a bagful of past-date yellow kernels onto the compost (“Popcorn,” *Wikipedia*, accessed Sept. 2021). An arboreal species, *Paulownia tomentosa*, is valued in China, Korea, and Japan for making the soundboards of these five instruments: guqin, guzheng, pipa, koto, and gayageum. (*Wikipedia*, accessed Oct. 2021.) Kinds of font (e.g. PMingLiU-ExtB) can probably be numbered but only in theory. The website penchalet.com offers 137 kinds of fountain-pen ink—colors, brands, waterproof, document quality. A Lego Creator kit for a yellow Fiat 500 includes 960 parts. There are more than fifty kinds of Glock pistol, an item that varies by size, caliber, style, and notches. (Tom: “I have two guns, a glue gun for Sandy and a tape gun for packing boxes; I hope the government does pry them out of my glued taped fingers so I can eat my dinner.”)



Names of mangoes on Jamaican trees: Julie, East Indian, turpentine, black, Guinea hen, common, John Bellyful, and greenskin. “East Indian, the number one, is long, has an oval seed, and when it’s ripe the skin is yellow. We had a tree in the backyard, and this lady passing by didn’t want to ask for the mango, so she came back that night and cut off a dozen.” (Kerry Hyatt).

Apples have 7500 known cultivars (“Apple,” *Wikipedia*, accessed Sept. 2021). Compare 2100 *Asanas: The Complete Yoga Poses* (by Daniel Lacerda: Running Press, 2015.). Sounds of American Automatic transmissions of the sub-div 1950s? Buick Dynaflo with its more-than-twelve-tone turbine; Oldsmobile’s Hydra-matic with its gentle series of pumps; and Ford’s *dutiful-dutiful-dutiful* —the entire group fuller but still limited.

The Chart of Common Characters of Modern Chinese includes 3500 logograms. (wenjunior.com). Never overlook the total number of languages themselves, extinct and extant, known and unknown, but still limited. Vocal fillers in the United States (in English) might be topped off as *um, uh, mmm, I mean, Y’know what I mean? Y’know what I’m sayin? You know, like, ‘n’ stuff, ‘n stuff like that, and uh, but uh.*

Some things we know. Some things we know we don’t know. Some things we don’t know we don’t know. Y’know?

The Crystal Bible defines 200 such minerals, which range from the rare diamond to the ubiquitous quartz, and from the raw to the cut & polished. Each has a unique color, shape, size, degree of rarity, and source, along with effects on the mind, emotions, spirit, and the healing process. (5) *Holy Stones!* Vehicles named after animals? Beetle, Ram, Mustang, Viper, Impala.... How about auto brands that end in *i*: Maserati, Lamborghini, Infiniti, Audi, Chevi....

Please circle the American brand of the 1950s *not* named for a man or men, if any: (alphabetical):

Buick, Chevrolet, Chrysler, De Soto, Edsel, Ford, Frazer, Henry J., Hudson, Kaiser, Lincoln, Nash, Oldsmobile, Packard, Pontiac, Studebaker, Willys.**



Yogi Andrea W. Vasaune,
Nice, France 2025.

Question 3: Whether personal collections be Countables.

Yes, if completed. As for numbering the *types* of collections, however, there is no end—figurines, stamps, coins, apple species, Figaros, neckties, vinyl records, whatever.

Paul Zelinsky, as a favor, counted the tubes of paint in the box photographed in Scripture 18. The tally: seventy-six, along with three little empty metal containers for turpentine and painting medium. (By email, Aug. 17, 2022.) Although Mr. Flores is the mayor of Figurine City (Scripture 4), he's not also the census-taker, so the population remains undetermined even though fixed. A list of recipes for frog-legs in the Larousse collection:

à l'anglaise, à la béchamel, au blanc, as a border (au gratin), in cream, curried, fried, fritters, à la lyonnaise, à la Mornay, à la niçoise, with chopped parsley, à la poulette, sautéed à la provençale, à la meunière, à la Mirepoix. (6)

Trunkloads of stamps collected by John L. Nelson, 1923-2016: innumerable categories of tiny, glue-backed, rectangular particulars to be inventoried only by Rumpelstiltskin.



Courtesy Cheryl Nichols.

The author's classical music albums, inherited from "Uncle" Charlie, appear to sag in a panorama-shot below. They include some of the earliest long-playing records, dating from around 1950. The library-quality cross-index—of performers, titles, kinds of music, etc.—is itself a 3 X 5 testimony to plenitude:



Neckties: although they once *hung from him*, he now *hangs on to them*. These accessories vary little as to shape but range quite a bit as to material and design. May they inspire your own inventory of Held Onto's:



Student, looking up my tie in agitation: "I thought that duck was *flying*!" Teacher: "I have two ducks—one waddles."

A number are silk, one is knit, one is a coarse weave, most are unremarkable in material. A number are solid-colored, and more than a few bear geometric patterns—e.g., the red-and-black squares of a Roberto Villini hand-made silk. A few are striped, horizontally or diagonally—for example the blue-and-orange celebration of a university, plus a capital **I**. Stripes coexist with any kind of print. About eight ties are flowered, some of these also with geometric patterns, and a half-dozen are Paisleys. One resembles a batik creation. A few of the prints celebrate Christmas with

holly, musical horns, or decorated trees. One seems plucked from a peacock. One four-color design envisions downtown Chicago from the air, and in fact one of its tiny purple buildings looks down upon Michigan Avenue in Scripture 5. Another reproduces parts of musical manuscripts, one of them "Calli-hoe Air de Ballet No. 3." Another holds shelves of books—37 ½ sections over the almost-five-foot length of the garment. (7)

How far can such a collection diverge from Aquinas' simplicity and uniformity of heaven? From Plato's world of the intellect and the One True Tie? Wait! Is the monk himself not eyeing a handsome sample? Yes, he is even encircling his waist with it! Worthy of admiration, this intricate accessory. It comprises rectangles of about 7 cm (as aligned top-to-bottom) by 6 cm (side-to-side). These shapes compose about 110 horizontal rows that range from 7 ½ squares wide to 2½. Each parallel row contains rectangles of different colors: bright red, paler red, purple and dark green. Each rectangle of color is separated by seven dark lines (more narrowly-spaced in the vertical stripes). The rows of *striped* rectangles alternate in a repeated pattern: at the widest point light red, bright red, dark green, dark purple, light red, bright red, dark green, purple. The *lined* rectangles alternate with rows of colored rectangles with no lines, just microscopically stippled. (8)



Disparity between work and worth—
unfungible.



Iron Horse of the Louisville &
Nashville Railroad.

A simpler design just chugged in: Coincidentally, the map in its background shows the rail-route that carried the author up from Knoxville to Cincinnati when he transferred to the University of Illinois.

So now from ties woven to ties wooden. Among the many possible categories is “Abandoned Railroad Passenger Routes.” Examples from the author’s figurative collection:

Knoxville to Cincinnati, January 1964. Overnight, as one of the last passengers to ride these tracks, he tried to sit up or curl up on double seats divided by fixed arms, as the moon bobbed over an unknown river from ever-surprising directions.

Glen Ellyn to Chicago on the “Roarin’ Elgin.” For instance with Tom (about 1958), who had granted his plea for company into the city. Why? “Gotta see its lights!”

Augusta, Georgia to Atlanta, 1961. Overnight at oxen-speed after an ice storm canceled airplane and bus travel from Charlie’s. When he got up to walk around, a uniformed soldier tucked into his seat for a spell of energetic kissy-face with an attractive woman. Who wants to make out with somebody’s mother, anyway.

Wilmington to Seaford, Delaware, Thanksgiving 1965. As the train sped over the flat peninsula in a straight line, he found

himself sitting next to the gorgeous Candy. But that night she had Something to Do, so he kept that date with Uncle Charlie and Richard Wagner.

In the photo below, you can look up at trophies, part of a softball team's 200 of them. They preside over numerous boxes that, although identically-branded, distinguish a multitude of gizmos.



Courtesy Electrical Supply Inc., Christiansburg, VA.



An Emmy.
By permission Erin Lyall.

A group might change its total number of members. The original Five Senses, for example, has been augmented by Proprioception (Scripture 21). And the particulars may change. At a Lowe's store, the list of Five High-Theft Items, posted for employees today, might include the Craftsman 2-cycle blower (\$299); tomorrow, the 10/2 CU NM-B W/G 250 ft. (\$319). The Top Forty songs change with the frequency of play. (By contrast, "Fifty ways to leave your lover," by Paul Simon, remains permanent even though partial.). A traveler's passport can change by day and decade as to its stamps and signatures. *Guinness World Records* can note any newly-set or broken record—e.g., for the longest distance swum under ice on one breath, with no fins or diving suit, female.

Items in a category may be fixed as to order yet scheduled to change as to substance: *52 Lists for Happiness: Weekly Journaling Inspiration for Positivity, Balance, and Joy*. (9) In 52 Pickup, the cards change randomly as to their arrangement, so in one deal, the Seven of Hearts might land face down on the King as if for protection, but in the next, upon the Queen as if for procreation.

Henry David built his hermit's hut in the woods because he wanted "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life," "drive life into a corner." (10) More accurately "Out of a corner." Because the essence of life is what else but distinction & multitude. No wonder that people seek refuge from the blur of phenomena, never ceasing, countable or countless. By whatever means, we crave a refuge. (11). A sense of the immutable, the pure, the unified, the eternal.

Other ways include meditation, medication, communion, adoration, alimentation, libation incantation, ululation, flagellation, hibernation, ablution, allelu-tion, hyper-nation (jingoism), and the Deep Resonance Serenity Bell of Hammacher Schlemmer. Ironical that this same partial inventory of escapes should augment Plenitude itself.

NOTES

* Series A. So is classical music “relaxing?”

** Brothers Chevrolet—Louis (1878-1941) & Arthur (1884-1946). Pontiac was an Indian chief.

1. Wilder Publications, Radford, VA, 2010, pp 72-73

2. Barbara Ann Kipfer, *The Order of Things: Hierarchies, Structures, and Pecking Orders*. New York: Workman, 2008, pp. 269-74. Thanks, Katie.

3. *Van Gogh: The Complete Paintings*. Ed., Intro. F. Walther. By Rainer Metzger. Cologne: Taschen/ Bibliotheca Universalis, 1990.

4. About seven years earlier, the Jewish musician Arnold Schoenberg had emigrated from Austria to the United States. He pioneered the twelve-tone method of musical composition (dodecaphony). Each of the dozen notes of the chromatic scale must be played in a series that the composer invents, called a “row,” before a note can be reused. This method offers a musical structure that replaces tonality—i.e., an established key—and, who knows, perhaps even considers melody as benign tyranny. Many twelve-tone works come across as severe, definitely no encouragement to dance, whether Viennese waltzing or schottish-clogging. But the author of *Angel* had the privilege of attending a performance of *Wozzeck*, an atonal opera by Alban Berg. First performed in 1925, it is a gift to musical plenitude with its lavish, unpredictable chord-progression and other techniques that created a near-psychedelic experience. One person disparaged melody thus: “Musik ist kein Tchu-Tchu!” (R.W. reports this outburst soberness.)

5. Judy Hall, *The Crystal Bible: A Definitive Guide to Crystals*. Cincinnati: Walking Stick Press, 2003.

6. *Larousse Gastronomique: the Encyclopedia of Food, Wine, & Cookery*, ed. Charlotte Turgeon and Nina Froud. New York: Crown, 1961. Trans. 1938 edition, ed. Prosper Montagné, pp. 435-36.

7. One picture a detail from Henri Rousseau’s painting *The Dream*: an ebony, glow-eyed, primitive, surrounded by jungle stares at the viewer while playing a yellow pipe and wearing a kind of apron on his torso. Its stripes are indigo blue, yellow, and (most prominent) pinkish melon. An oval white moon shines above and tigers stare with ocular flashlights below. This woven painting was hung, but on a clothes hanger, so that artistic would not be deemed racist.

8. So neckties illustrate another dimension of Plenitude: *time*. Below, the author shares memories about a group of particulars. He invites you to undertake such an inventory. Without memory, Plenitude is chaos.

“Look but do not touch the tie” was his jocular warning. And to anyone who dared to question the lecture, “Who’s wearing the tie?” On rainy days he donned one of the bright prints as a teaching aid. The Dior creation was brought back from Paris by in-laws. His daughter cross-stitched *Dad* onto that knit specimen—more precious than legible—and his wife sewed a stubby but wide-and-thick-weave job, with loud American Indian designs that, although worthy of affection, departed the closet only on Halloween. That shiny-flowered article he donned on the pilgrimage to the astronaut. The fabric decorated with musical staves, measures, and notes, he bought on a warm hill in Prague. A sad garment he borrowed from his brother’s closet for the impromptu funeral.

9. By Morea Seal. Seattle: Sasquatch, 2016. Compare the thirty days of devotion offered in *Move Mountains*, by Vince Stegall, with Irvin Baxter. EndTimes Ministry.

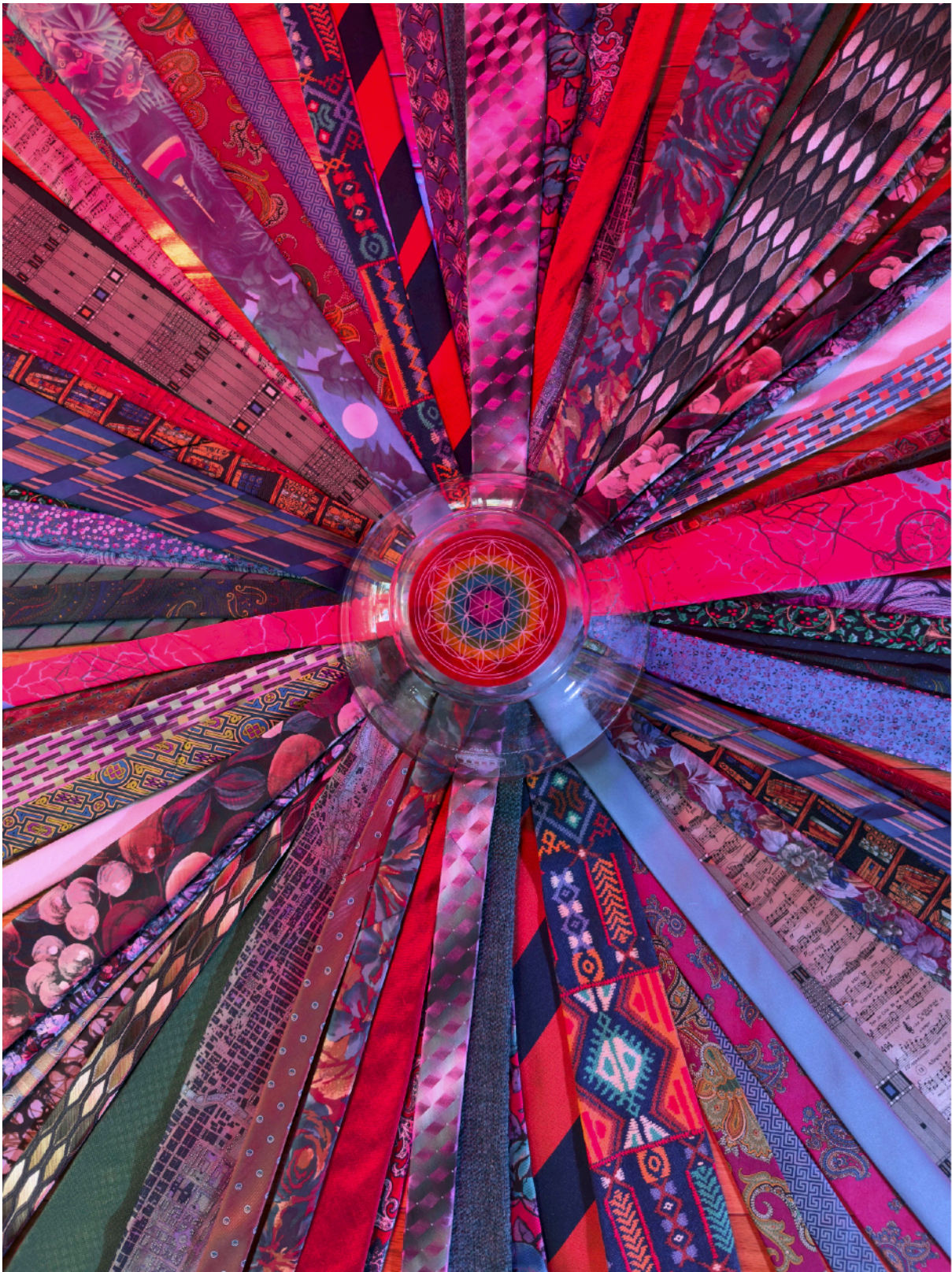
10. “*Walden*” and “*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*.” Masterpiece Library Edition. New York: Peter Pauper, 2024, p. 82.

11. One person shares her corner, two share their callings:

Daughter. As a teenager Katie would sometimes repair to a cabin in the sky—a fire tower in a nearby field. The many-windowed cube overlooking treetops offered her solitude as well as what she now calls the adventure of autonomy: “I didn’t share walls with anyone but the sky.” Her only company was the little red CD-player, battery operated because no electric outlet.

Massage therapist and friend, Sudha Heather Shelton:

I am a pilgrimage junkie, Camino Francis, Camino Portuguese, Mt. Kailash, Kumano Kodo, Thailand, Mustang —Oh my, so on and on. I have been called to walk many paths. I have no idea Why. I guess for me it is a calling. It’s amazing to walk on sacred ground that has been walked by humans for thousands of years. I meet so many along the way. It’s my love. I do no research or take note of kilometers in a day. I never know what I am doing and that’s the beautiful thing. I walk on paths that take me to better knowing of myself. I am still walking. Who knows where next I will be called. I am looking for nothing nor do I have any illusions that I will find something I don’t already have. I am just poking around in the mystery.



Necktie Mandala by Katherine Wells, 2025.

Scripture 8

Proverbs I: "First, Toss Garbage"

The author now reaches into the burlap Bible-sack, rustles around for onions, peels their sacred skins, and reads aloud: "The Book of Proverbs."

He notes that its many verses seem like instructions to youth for a holy and moral life—rather than like practical folk-sayings. **(1)** An exception: "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion" (11:20). He now offers advice. Some of it is solely practical, on the order of *Life's Little Instruction Book, Vol. II*. **(2)** But most hint at the metaphorical. "Garbage," you might quickly assume, refers not to eggshells, coffee grounds, and packaging, but instead to whatever a person might metaphorically discard in favor of a better day or life. Physical clutter, chores not done, obligations unfulfilled, social ties that smell faintly over-the-hill. Bag up the psycho-detritus!

First toss garbage.

Don't go sailing, hold the railing.

Avoid an argument and win; win one and lose.

If you can't buy a friend, who *can* you buy?

The lion that lieth with the lamb starveth.

Two things at a time's a crime.

The point of a beer is to have another.

Don't moon anyone from a church bus.

The house of friendship comes with a tool box.

The tend'rest organ's the wallet.

When one door shuts, watch your fingers.

Blessed is he who keeps one bad thing from causing another.

Don't say shit at the table or grace on the toilet.

Blasted are the peacemakers.

You can be logophobic and not know it.*

Many hands make light work, said the Devil.

What a hand finds down your pants is your business.

Don't let your How forget your Why.

If you're missing a loop, let it be literal.

May your short-term memory be long.

May you kiss your grandchild's first gray hair.

The emptiest room is one jammed with memories.

Think in bed, eyes of red.

Lift your ear from the railroad track 'fore it hears that clickety-clack.

Don't chew gum in Singapore or pangolin in Wuhan.

Better no cane than a bejeweled shillelagh.

Know which side your butt is breadered on.

I n Buddha-land, show your butt not your foot.

T reat water like money, not money like water.

G uys have feet/To move Mr. Pete.

I f you fall on stairs, fall up.

I f you carry the Truthful Torch, let it not your fingers scorch.

S oak before scrub.

T here's no Thee in Country or You in Universe.

D on't trip on your tools.

O ust Jews, pay dues.

U ncle & Auntie Semitic have nieces & nephews prolific.

M ay he who expects seventy-two virgins get seventy-six trombones.

M ove some guilt to the shelf, you didn't engender yourself.

T here's no "T" in "I'm."

D on't confuse alfresco with Alfredo.

G od never sends us more than others can bear.

M y Father's World has faults.

NOTES

* Syllables the author learned from his mother's Word of the Day calendar.

1. Robert C. Dentan, "The Proverbs." *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible: Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocrypha*. Ed. Charles Laymon. Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1971, pp. 304-19



If paddle & pet is all you've got, it's a yacht.
Alice and Charlie at Oak Island. Photo by Mike Vasaune, 2026.

2. Jackson Brown, Sr. Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 1993.

Scripture 9

Geodyyssey III: "Erzerum Coming!"



The Burlap Boys. *Glen Ellyn News*.

Through the grate of the Third-Class window, I spy First-Class adventure.

Soon amid the rush of passengers and good-byers we find ourselves mingling with a few Turkish fellows. They make sure that the agent has regarded our student's discount card (which lowers the price to \$5); and that he has given us a ticket to the railhead near the end of the Anatolian Plateau rather than to a closer town—a name we couldn't read—and pocketing the difference.

A guy led us to the train, one of five or six headed by locomotives ready to puff off towards the Mediterranean, Russia, or the East. Through the jammed carriages we labored, knocking our luggage into everything, as our expedition threatened to come without seats. When one acquaintance haltingly explained that he was trying to make arrangements, we told him that meanwhile we wouldn't mind sitting temporarily on our sleeping bags in an entryway. I was uncomfortable and bored.

Later on, a student came to our little rest area and bade us follow him. We found ourselves in a compartment bursting with young men. "So crowded," I thought, "but at least we have a seat." We stuffed away our bags and watched all the faces smiling at us and each other. The Turks chatted among themselves in affectionate tones. Apparently some of them were just saying farewell and about to exit the train. Would I be able to sleep lying down, or would the trip be an endurance contest? I tried to ask how many were staying but got no decipherable response. After a good deal of walking in and out, three students remained in the compartment and waved out the raised window to their friends. Through the thick window the platform began sliding backwards.

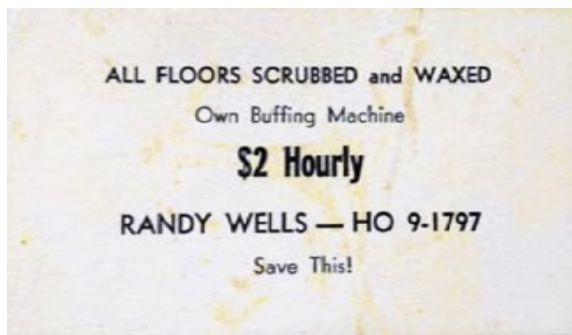
"Where you live?" asked one of the guys with embarrassment. "Ah-me-di-kah," he repeated after me. It took me a long time to understand that, although students in Istanbul, they were going home for a vacation in Erzerum, a city near the border of Russia and Iran. "Do you have a... a dodderling?" No, but I took out my wallet to show him the photo of a pretty classmate. Trying to be a good sport (my mother's ideal), I asked if he had a girlfriend. Giggles. As we passed through a village, I noticed strange machines skirting back and forth in the night—not automobiles but horse-drawn cabriolets. "Where you live in Ahmedikah?" My carefully enunciated answer drew a response: "Oh-h-h. Sheekahgo." More animated Turkish chit-chat.

While Tom asked what they studied, I wondered how we'd divide up the sleeping places. Foggy computation: five fellows plus baggage. "Hey, Tom! Why don't we sleep on the luggage racks?" With no response from anyone, afraid to broach any new idea, I sweated out some more chatting.

"You stay Istanbul?" After learning of our three-day sojourn, he gave me a look of "What a shame!" and asked, "You not like Istanbul?" "Oh, man, I gotta sleep," I thought. Tom came through with good words about the city, giving me time to compute. Wow, they got a lotta baggage.... Why not recline on those nice long, solid wooden shelves! "Was very beautiful," finished the diplomat.

My notion turned out to be familiar practice, and the Turks prepared to give us the choice rack-beds. I convinced one of them to spread out their baggage while Tom and I stuck our junk all over the compartment. Into some cranny went my boots. Tom and I had mailed our suitcases home from Istanbul with our dress clothes and shoes, and with my journal, now embellished by autographs.

Now we carried only bedrolls, a large cloth bag of food, knapsacks heavy with clothing fresh and dirty, toiletries, a little flashlight, a miniature German dictionary, and a proud passport. I also toted a hardcover book on capital development in poor countries, bought in Oxford and never to be read. A folded, thick-plastic poncho jammed an outer pocket. We each carried a blue plastic folder of American Express checks that were strangely thin for such weighty American dollars. Tom shouldered a camera with its leather strap, but his gloves had been stolen at the YMCA in Istanbul. Although apprehensive about the dangers of traveling, we carried no weapon.



Two-and-a-half hours of travail,
for two-and-a-half days of travel.

Tom suggested that he lie on the floor, as the other guys had no sleeping bags, but I chose to be content among cigarette butts. Ironically, half the funds for the trip had come from scrubbing floors. One of the widowed sisters (my lawn-mowing clients) had even taught me best-practice: scrub the perimeter first, end by drying the mopped residue with a large cloth.

Filthy & flat was restful compared to clean but upright, the bench that we had occupied through much of Yugoslavia on the *Orient Express* (a.k.a. *L'Eau non Potable*). I remembered how, well east

of the Adriatic, dawn competed with smoke over villages with red-tiled roofs. Now I shook off a memory of the twenty-four hour train trip to Istanbul from Salonika, Greece— although the prize for worst experience went to the man who, caught smuggling, wept over the open case of dolls. Wistfully I also remembered the first night of our trip, when the two vans parked overnight outside Cleveland and we climbed atop those ping-pong tables for a lofty and deep slumber.

Our companions knew Turkish passenger-tricks. Although they couldn't do much about the conductor who Got Us as we were almost asleep, they applied the right verbal formulas to people who kept opening the door, and they physically kept some from barging in. As the rails clicked, the car swayed and shook me to oblivion.

Vague stirrings, which I ignored. More little noises.... After fewer than six hours, my companions were rustling around. A waste of precious restoration. I looked for solace from Tom but again seemed to be the odd one. Human linoleum—early-birds pecking around me. “Why don't you blow a damn trumpet, guys?” I thought as I rolled up my sleeping bag. How could Tom's habit of rising early to work in “The Shop” have followed him across the ocean? The sun was now rising over the plains, turning our dingy compartment an incongruously cheerful pink.

Burlap breakfast was a tangy orange, some bread and cheese. I mechanically fed myself while staring at the new landscape. Barren. The Turks lazed around in their pajamas while I nibbled chocolate, there being no opium. Now why was it only me that hated a daylong sauna? Enough with the insouciance! Every so often I would escape from the Turkish bath to cold storage in the aisle. During escapes to the WC, I'd look through the squat-hole at the ties as they sped back irretrievably toward Istanbul. The corridor held little seats that folded out from beneath the windows, so whenever someone walked through either way, I'd have to collapse my home.



Photo by author.

Back to Hot, where I hung up my coat and sat in the corner with my precious *Time*, November 1961. Unable to be civil, I isolated myself from everything but, ironically, the “People” section. Once in a while a Turk ventured a few syllables but I couldn’t muster interest. After half an hour, I felt my magazine gently slip away from my hand to someone else’s. I stared out the window with my mouth open: why not put crumbs in my undershirt? When the group inquired about an advertisement, I couldn’t help because they were unfamiliar with American life and language. Finally they laid the thing down on the small fold-out table; I picked it up and retired to my corner and, unable to turn my back to them, set it toward Iran.

As the topography started to billow, the engine searched for the fewest isobars. I cooled my nose near the plate glass, occasionally rewarded by a vista of the train’s entire arc. The locomotive chugged in the sun and poplars glistened against the blue sky, perhaps drawing a smile.

But then The Boy. Maybe seven years old, pep in his pants, and whoever heard of a Turk with blue eyes? Travel is so broadening. As we peered out an aisle window in a vaguely northern direction, he stood on a little ledge so that his head was even with mine and I felt those bright orbs fixed on me. No curiosity, no wonder, fear, or friendliness, just beams. Was he mentally ill? And suddenly, what I had feared as a traveler: he squeezed the trigger. Out came a long squirt as he darted off.

Once, looking far ahead, I saw that the wheeled-and-rodded boiler was about to enter a tunnel and tried to guess the exact moment we passengers would burst into it. *Whoomph!* Nothing but darkness, the clacking, the unseen surveillant. “Beat it, kid,” I growled later. When he finally turned to watch the landscape, I retreated to the compartment, hung up my coat, and took out my chocolate, which to my surprise hadn’t melted.

“Hey, Randy,” began Tom, “all the world knows that tone of voice.” “I *meant* it to be that tone of voice!” Exiting again, I plumped down on a board-seat with hands warming a coat pocket and breath fogging the air. That afternoon I wanted badly to doze off. But the various benches were taken up, and on one rack lay my fellow hooky-player, who slept away, then woke up and lay there like a suitcase.

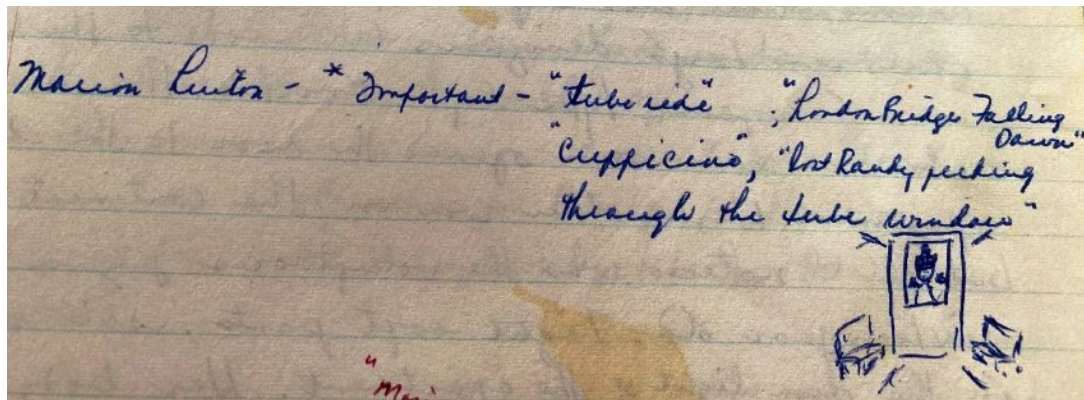
A decent overnight sleep brought good morale. The train labored up a slight incline, and as the hours passed, the land became more mountainous. Into the first snow we had seen puffed black cinders, and down came flakes to cover unattractive features of the landscape.

For diversion we took a seesaw-hike along aisles and through connecting vestibules. We reached the second class section, then the first, where I passed Lord Essex, my nickname for a British gentleman I had met on the ferry across the Bosphorus to Asia. His attire rather elegant, he had stood there poking the ferrule of his dapper-wrapped umbrella against the deck and keeping his distance from my scruffy forwardness. Tom and I spoke briefly with several young people who were traveling together, one of them a woman, O creature rare!

The train would sometimes pick up farmers carrying shovels and other tools. These peasants in ragged outfits wore tanned, wrinkled faces. One couple got on board with a little girl who seemed apprehensive about that man who was not only rumpled but bearded. Although her parents also had doubts, they smiled shyly when the child peeped around them and drew a wink.

After watching the spectacle of snow falling into chasms, I turned around to play peek-a-boo and induce a laugh. The conductor checked our tickets time and again, perhaps from boredom.

Our meals were still pulled magician-like from the woven sack. Although my chocolate was gone, we still had staples, plus wine—all refreshingly chilled because Tom had thought to suspend the larder out the window in a netted bag. We enjoyed sharing vittles with our companions. I got a kick out of saying “Take another piece, go ahead!” and see a fellow smile. After one guy held out an orange and made me take it, another offered his knife to me and made a peeling gesture. I pretended that my orange was frozen: unable to puncture the skin with the knife, I grimaced—“Aargh!”—as my companions laughed. Tom opened the window and made as if to drape the bottle outside without the net.



“Randy peeking through the Tube window.” By Marion Linton of Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

After lunch I might read my magazine, saving the best parts for last. I might re-scan a precious letter from the U.S.A. or take out a book and read a few parts to Tom. We’d wonder about our friends in college, where our sophomore year was managing to carry on by itself, and laugh about good times with our friends in Europe. No doubt we recalled riding the Tube in London with a duo of alumnae from the *Nova Scotia*, one of whom could literally purr. She sketched a memory of one stop when I sprinted out to the platform, entered the car behind, ran to the head of it, and stared deadpan at the rest of the party.

The hours of boredom may have added ballast to our geo-equanimity. During the past month we had thumbed from Paris to Nancy on two successive Citroën sedans, as if in a relay. Near Germany we had betaken our thumbs—useless, wet, outstretched, despairing—from the highway and into a tavern. There we split a cheerful liter of beer, then returned to the rain and climbed into a sudden taxi for a free ride to the border. At an inn, both of us us slept under a gymnastic-mat of a cover that did little to help me digest the creamy meal served in the restaurant below. And that excursion to Berne through the nocturnal Black Forest in a luxurious BMW. Hitchhiking to Interlaken, we ordered a train ticket to Istanbul that required an hour to publish. After Milan, we enjoyed a quick and free boat-trip through Venice courtesy of a professor. Finally at the end of our ticket, in a taxi en route to the Istanbul YMCA, the driver announced an exorbitant price; “STOP!” yelled Tom, who thus lowered the fare.



We wondered about longitudes-to-come: “Hope we’ll be able to get a bus from this place.” “Yeah. I sure hope they run regularly in the winter. Maybe we’d have to take that one train through Russia.” I’d pull out my small-scale world atlas, given to us by the steward on our Atlantic voyage, to look over the route again. “Think we’ll ever get to this pink one?” I smiled, pointing. “I don’t know; it looks like this green one’ll never end.”

I had used up my magazine refuge, its mute symbols ordered into type-faces, grammar, sentences, paragraphs, and columns. Out the window passed drab. I was leaning against the wall in a stupor when who should slide open the door of our compartment and tiptoe in but the winsome of the threesome, who pressed her warm pillows against me, caressed my beard, and made intimate offers, even to iron my pants, although I had probably dozed off.



One late afternoon, after two-and-a-half or three days, our companions announced that our destination was imminent. Especially good news because our diet needed variety and I needed to shave wiry hairs under my chin. I would have cut off the whole beard if it would make me less interesting to the blue irises. “Don’t be so intolerant, Randy,” said Tom back in the compartment. “He’s a nice little kid if you give him a chance. I get along with him fine. He came in here and started talking to me, so I answered him. Of course we couldn’t understand each other, but he was real happy.” I felt like screaming “OK, Mr. Perfect, why don’t you wear your coat in this

damn hell of a compartment and pretend it's not hot!" But I just slid open the door and walked out in disgust, although with time I entertained some admiration.

"Erzerum coming!"

High spirits returned as once again we began to roll, pack, and tie up. The fridge was reeled in and the wine emptied. "Want this?" "Oh yeah, thanks." "Would you hold down the end of this while I roll it up?" "Sure, which end?" "The one on the end there." Door opened, kid gave a farewell shot and took off for his galaxy.

Joining passengers who stood in the hall, on the right-hand side of the train, I watched for signs of town. The glass momentarily framed a military jeep that waited at a crossing yet slid rightward and off the screen, as did random buildings and roads. I began to haul my baggage into the corridor but was prevented by a smiling compartment-mate who gestured in a swinging motion toward the window. No taxicabs at the station, only sleighs. In the dusk this place seemed the farthest outpost of Siberia, snow blending with sky but contrasting with buildings. Bells tinkled faintly as horses padded along.

Again I struggled to don my backpack, my own yoke of mobility. Jumping off the bottom stair, I felt a strange give under my heavy boots. Now directly out of our compartment came suitcases, bags, and green canvas knapsacks, my job being to keep an eye on the luggage while people went off to check on hotels and buses. Our friends helped us with everything, even telling the driver where to take us. Boisterous goodbyes!

Jing, jing, jing, jing.... Tom invites me to sit in front with the driver while he takes the backward-facing rear seat. We pull thick, heavy blankets over our laps as the runners slide through the white darkness. My companion turns around happily and gestures to the driver: "Why not lend him the reins?"



Scripture 10
The Weather: "Glad to See You!"



"Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life." Genesis 9:15.

Beyond the frosty storm-window of our living room, the long, black night had dumped a new dispensation.

Sparkling flakes obscured the rotting leaves and lifeless grass, the distinction between yards and pavement, even the imaginary property lines like the one that set off their catalpa. The expanse was not yet broken by the intaglio arm-flapping of children.

The snow also increased my value as a high school freshman or sophomore with muscles, and when someone phoned to ask if I would clear her father-in-law's driveway so he could get to work, I decided to take off school for the morning. My feet left imprints on whiteness that muffled the few ambient sounds, so I could easily hear my own hard breathing, and the rubbery jingle of my galoshes. Down the slope of Cottage Ave. I passed the pee-pocket spots of a dozen years earlier. Occasionally I had to use my shovel as a walking-stick to push off from a drift or keep my balance, yet my thoughts enjoyed no such prop. What should I do?



Printed on miniature press
owned by Stan's cousin. c.1955.

I had several regular patrons, three in a row, across the street from the other driveway. They had been my lawn-mowing customers, moreover, for several years. Did they not stand first in line? Two of them worked in the city and had to get out somehow. Yet none of them had phoned to ask for a timely scrape.

I trudged to the left onto Newton Ave., thinking about my new customer, Mr. Smith, as I'll call him, who may have been past his middle sixties. Once or twice I had greeted him near his office downtown as I walked or pushed my bike on the sidewalk. A rather portly figure in a dark suit, he accorded me only a gruff and unsmiling syllable.

Now my parka seemed to tighten and stiffen. I remembered how other adults would greet me with cheerfulness—neighbors, acquaintances of my parents, parents of my schoolmates, customers for my odd jobs or paper routes.

Did I not deserve respect, not just for being myself, but for serving as tiller of the municipal acreage? It seemed like my own farm: the sidewalks, alleys, ball fields, vacant lots, cemetery, parks, stores, railroad tracks, even the water tower, set back from Cottage Ave. Once when I took an adventuresome cut from Pennsylvania Ave. through no-man's land, I found myself in a backyard on Anthony St. and admired a row of gourds. The elderly owner emerged, introduced himself as Mr. Hartung, and invited me into the basement, where he continued to work on a project and I marveled at the foundation made not of concrete but of big, partly-fashioned rocks.

The town's two sets of railroad tracks, the oiled-dust streets near one corner, the weedy fields beyond its limits; swamp and lake skated, trees climbed, telephone poles shinnied. What about the heat-exhaustion that forced me into bed after I tried to cut high grass with a reel lawn mower? (My mother had to pull the shade down so far that not a crack of sunshine got in.) The town I even inhaled—from the first waft of winter-surviving vegetation, to the new-mown green under my bicycle tires at the swimming-pool park, to the sour stink of burning leaves, to the automobile exhaust that vented above dirty fender-droppings into the dense, pure air.

But no vehicle crawled up or down Hawthorn to distract me, no tire-chains sang. On that hill I thought of the random flashes in the winter sky caused (someone explained) by ice on the third rail of the Chicago, Aurora, & Elgin. I made my way up the middle of the invisible street as I climbed toward the driveways just over the top. On my left inclined the white sidewalk, where my only decision had been when to convert a galosh-gallop to a belly-flop, and my only challenge had been to keep my scuttling sled a few inches away from the concrete retaining wall.

Now I shifted the long wooden handle to my other glove. Why had none of those familiar customers phoned? Surely one of them would appear at the front door: "Glad to see you!" Surely a businessman needed to reach the train station. Since both of the retired sister-widows could easily remain at home, perhaps I could quickly dispatch two jobs and then cross the street to the requested one.

Worse, I had a vague feeling that Mr. Smith's age, physique, and slightly gray skin could make him a candidate for a heart attack. How easy it would be for me to lean into the heavy snow and toss it to the side all the way up to his garage. Yet had he not jumped the line? Could he not go to work late? The parka's throat-flap, usually a bulwark against frozen air, rubbed my neck. Now reaching the crest, I viewed the invisible street as it sloped down to Western Ave., then continued flat to Prairie, where on a school day, freshman year, Stan would slide open his bedroom window and echo my Tarzan-yodel. Surveying the three houses on the right, I perceived no stuck cars, no tire-tracks to indicate a successful exit and thus a canceled dilemma. Again I remembered looking up at the burgher as he disregarded the urchin; again I heard my promise.

After a half-hour of bending, leaning, scraping, lifting, and tossing, I noticed that drops of sweat had spotted my shovel. When I looked up for a moment I beheld a revolving light that made its way up the street and tinged the snow red. That such an ominous vehicle could be silent!

Abandoning the swathe of newly bare cement, I cut diagonally across the street to Mr. Smith's porch. As two men carried him along the driveway from the direction of his garage, he looked up at me with rheumy eyes as saliva bubbled around his lips. I stood holding my useless blade, watching him with sympathy, embarrassment, and dread.

Existential meteorology: a choice freely made.

Scripture 11

D & M III: Parts, Anomalies, and Incongruities

Once more into the whirlwind! The Secular Express now rocks through a cyclone, almost having to ride the ties as it passes Dorothy's neighbor, Miss Elmira Gulch, who strains to pedal a fat-wheeler through the rough "whether."

Question 1. Whether a physical component helps to define the whole.

Postage stamps are easy to categorize as either Postmarked or Not. But collectors scrutinize each for the date, occasion, design, source, degree of rarity, and whatever *Wikipedia* lists as technical particulars: paper, method of printing, gum, method of separation, overprints if any, and security markings as well as fakes and forgeries. ("Philately," accessed 21 Dec. 2021.)

On a railway, parts that connect the passenger to the ground (photos by author).

Wheels.

About a yard in diameter, they are either cast or forged with a curved projection from one edge—a flange. This spinning rim extends along the inside of a rail, which it continually hugs and fights. Its counterpart clings to the other rail. Both wheels cooperate to keep the train upright, for a lurch in one direction presses the rim harder against the inside of that rail and a lurch to the other, ditto. So a train rides not only upon a rail but *inside* it.



Rails.

In the photograph below, the end of the rail in the foreground displays three sub-parts:

- (1) the Head gently convex, expands the surface that makes contact with the wheel.
- (2) the Web raises the rail.
- (3) the Bottom anchors it.

Rails arrive in sections, with hundreds of variations of shape and weight, past and present.

Groundwork. Rails run upon "layers of ballast and sub-ballast above a prepared sub-grade/formation." ("Track bed," *Wikipedia*, with reference to *Network Rail*. Accessed Oct. 2021.)

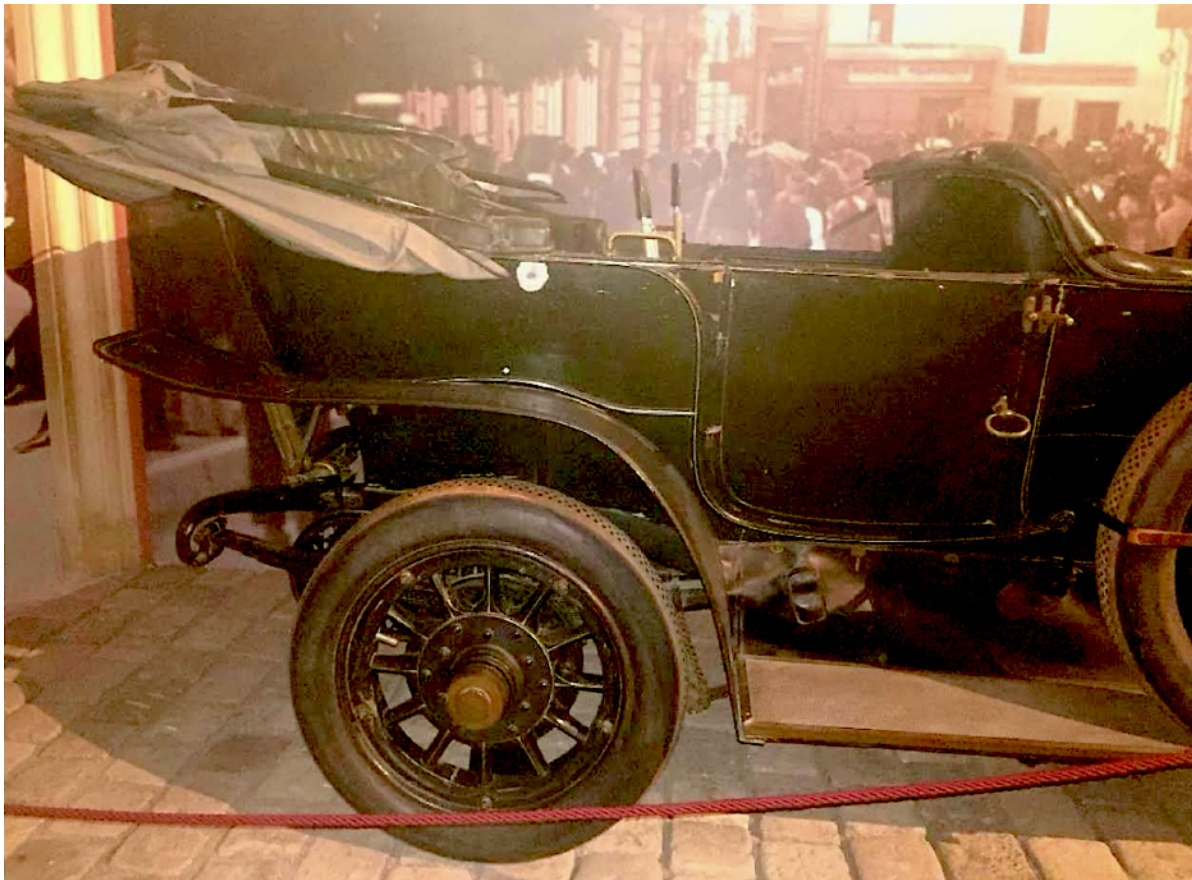


Crossties. Onto the solid, fairly-level roadbed are laid heavy ties. Called “stringers,” they are generally made of wood, often of prestressed concrete, occasionally of steel. One mile of track requires 3250 wooden ties. Against these cross-wise timbers or molds the rails are pinned by plates and no-nonsense spikes.

The system can break down. When Ol’ 97 approached the trestle, it hit the curve so fast (as Lyle reports in *Scalded*) that a flange at one side of the engine’s drive wheels broke off. “The careening steam locomotive jumped the track. It ran for some distance atop the wooden cross-ties, bumping along wildly at an impossible staccato pace, and then plunged off the trestle....” One witness remembered that the train “straightened out the curve” by plucking rails from the bridge (pp. 18, 23).

Question 2. Whether phases help define the whole.

The category Railroad Accidents reveals many a cause: boulder on track, broken rail, excessive speed.... One is Timetable Mistake, a danger in times of more primitive technology, when even a forgotten-to-send message could send one boiler into another and a trainman onto his knees.



Heeres eschichtliches Museum—Militärhistorisches Institut, Vienna. Photo by author.

The inauguration of World War II for the United States, of course, began with a surprise attack. “How Pearl Harbor Happened,” published in *Time* magazine, Feb. 2, 1942, describes a chain of seventeen supposedly negligent links. World War I was ignited on June 28, 1914, by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who had sought fresh air in his Graf & Stift. Five steps for Europeans to treat aboriginal Africans, applicable to other kinds of slavery:

Steal,
Enslave,
Impregnate,
Suppress,
Scorn.

Without due solemnity, which would require more than one scripture, *Angel* moves to chronology that underlies peaceful pursuits. Card games, for example, must follow definite steps. Business letters in the United States often deliver bad news in this tactful sequence:

Salutation. Valé, Brother Aquinas:

Neutral opening. We were honored that you should submit your manuscript to Scriptae Press. Of course your reputation ensured a careful reading by several experienced reviewers, who admired the equally exhaustive and perceptive analyses.

Reasons that justify the upcoming. No. “As you are aware, in this age of splintered religious denominations, waning attendance at services, and if I may say creeping secularism, the demand for five volumes of Roman Catholic theology in Latin has fallen into desuetude.”

Perhaps avoid stating the resale here and simply leave it implied.

Perhaps offer an alternative. Venerable one, you might reach out to a more fortunate publisher. And (again merely suggesting)—would you consider adjusting the work’s monumental length? Not to compromise its intrinsic value but instead to acknowledge the attention span of the modern reader.

Neutral and cordial ending. Saint Thomas, be assured that all of us here at Holy Publishers offer you prayers of encouragement.

In another indirect sequence: a movie “trailer” holds off revealing the title of a new film until it gins up interest with clips and voice-over. Writers of all kinds may postpone the identification of a character to raise curiosity or suspense. In the television miniseries *Transatlantic* (2023), a persistent, cigarette-puffing refugee saved from the Nazis—is at last named as Hannah Arendt, later a major political theorists of the twentieth century. Even in a children’s story—who is this new character in *The Voyages of Doctor Doolittle*?

She wore a straw hat on the side of her head with poppies on it, and her skirt was so long for her it dragged on the ground like a ball gown’s train. I could not see anything of her face because of the wide hat pulled over her eyes. But as she got nearer to us and the laughing of the children grew louder, I noticed that her hands were very dark in color and hairy, like a witch’s. (1)

Others soon recognized her as Chee-Chee, a male monkey.

Shakespeare was influenced by allegorical morality plays. In one, the author has the actor make an obnoxious entrance: “Aback, fellows and give me room / Or I shall make you to avoid [get out]. / I am peerless where ever I come.” Only then does the character identify himself as an abstraction: “My name is Youth I tell thee.” (*Youth*, perhaps by Craik, 1520?, Randall’s modernization.) In this brief example, the words, vocal features, facial expressions, costume, gestures, and locomotion create a swagger-bragger of a personification. So by fusing concept with concrete, the playwright resists woodenness and stimulates the imagination.

Unintentionally entertaining is the sound-sequence of an MRI Scan (Multiple Resonance Imaging). Here is a rough account of the author’s experience lying in the cylinder as magnets and radio waves worked their chaotic magic:

BLAST! Then a firm but courteous knocking, whack-whack-whack-whack. Then another explosion as if a stereo has been turned on at high volume. At times the machine resembles electronic music with an extremely low woofer and an endless variety of sounds either single or combined, often varying chromatically by a half step. At one point the woofer and a hurdy-gurdy bat back-and-forth. For a long spell, a couple of 33 ⅓ rpm measures, seemingly taken from the minimalist composer Philip Glass, spin over and over at 8 ⅓ rpm. An occasional phase of silence leads to sudden noise that hammers the inner ear’s stirrup to the anvil. BUZZ! Silence threatens. Time passes. Ping. *Zort*. Clunk. One spell resembles jazz with its antiphonal knocks and strange chords, but the duet can’t maintain its rhythm—as when the chords come in a half-beat early or the knocks miss the fourth beat or add a fifth.

Can you transform this thunderous friction, this clanking, rolling parade of parts—box, cylinder, and slab—into a concept?



Video: Multitude of Passing Parts—Loud, Grating, and Clacking.

Creator: Randall Wells, June 2025.

Direct Link: youtu.be/OOgZZP6Fza0

Question 3. Whether a classification reveal an incongruity or anomaly.



Bird-and-Sam prints. Photo by boy. (2)



Three pals & a dog walk into a bar.

Besides visual incongruities (above), you may remember that “The Star Spangled Banner,” based on a poem that celebrated an American victory in a war with England (1812), became set to the music of a British song.

Other clashes:

Robbery. Thieves took everything they could from the house of Travis Wells (Randall’s nephew, the pilot of Scripture 5). But they abandoned the heirloom of a Philippe Patek wristwatch, an anomaly because easily traceable by an engraved name: *G.H. Capps, Sr.* (Given to him probably in the 1920s, it honored his twenty-five years of service to Heinz in Chicago.)

Radiology. About sixty years later, a shadow on an X-ray forecast that once again G.H.’s granddaughter would not return for a second year.

Exclamations. Please circle the lone outcry: *Chattaronga! Chickamauga! Cowabunga! Cuyahoga!**

Rivers. Which names a river: “Oh Shenandoah,” “Proud Mary,” *The Moldau.***

Female founder of a grocery store chain. Please circle the name (alphabetical): Butt, Florence; Coggins, Lucile J.; Grajales, Mariana.***

Songs and paintings. The author remembers hearing a ditty on the radio in the late 1940s: “I’m a Lonely Little Petunia in an Onion Patch.” (3) A neutral anomaly: the worlds of Peter de Viet (1784-1849) as appraised by Rockwell Kent: “His painting stands outside the English tradition, uninfluenced by the art of his time, and in turn having little effect upon it” (Plate 71, *World-Famous*).

Composer and composition. Faulty humans can create wonderful music. One major composer was famously unlikable. “They loved each other”—said a commentator about the married couple—“because nobody else did.”

Roads. American roads carry only a few oddball vehicles with right-side steering, such as Figaros and USPS conveyances.

Decorum breachers. Pushing his odd-jobs lawn mower too fast, the young author nudged one of the ceramic knick-knacks that encircled a birdbath, broke off a leg, and was fired for frog. After a genteel high-school dance, Randy and Tom and sort of loaded their dates into a beat-up panel truck driven by an employee of the Hollingers’ “Shop.” On the way to the pizza parlor, they sat on folding chairs at a wooden table, their degree of mirth inverse to the length of heels.

On a bus in Cancun, Mexico, a cooler of beer knelt before Our Lady of the Lager.

The shower areas of swimming pools hold the predictable towels and shoes. Friend Rich once lent me a large, black pair of swim-fins that had hung in the garage. While changing into a suit, I tip the opening of a fin—and out shoots a cannonball of a black, leathery, bumpy bulk with legs and claws that paw the air as it plops onto the alien floor—massive toad on tiles!

Hotel surprises.

- * In Cancun the door to a fairly expensive room opened and closed onto a mop of little gray ropes.
- * Near the Gare du Nord, at a hotel+train deal, the air in the room was so warm that we had to open the window onto the random ear-punishment of a spike being hammered at 5 a.m.
- * In Boston, the clerk forgot to tell Randall that his room shared a thin wall with the vending-machines.
- * Random explosions outdoors awoke Randall, Marjory, Andrea, and Katie. Rushing to the window, they beheld fireworks illuminating Frankfurt, Germany and announcing the new year—1989, the Bicenteneire in France, where they would live for six months.

Territorial skirmishes. The boy Randall once climbed behind the steering wheel of a junked Cord automobile, vintage 1930s. At a sharp pain he recoiled from his own earlobe all the way home.

Gastronomic violations. In Chapel Hill, North Carolina, while chewing a piece of bakery bread, I tasted something virulently pungent yet strangely familiar. I spat it onto the yard, returned to the cut loaf, and I discovered half a cigarette poking out of what the French call the *mie*. Other unexpecteds: Peanut butter on a French shelf. An apple from a Belgian grocery store became contraband to a beagle in the Atlanta Airport. A piece of fruit in an RV crossing from Canada to Maine became a threat to a Kiwi Nazi. The wrong mushroom caused Cornelius to shrivel greenly or purple and Babar to become king.

Local custom. In France, a church may share a wall with a bar and a sidewalk with poop. In the venerable Abbey Theatre of Dublin, candy-wrappers crinkle and fall to the floor. On an intercity Greyhound, when I pointed out the No Smoking sign to a fellow passenger, he responded, “I always smokes on the bus.”

House rules. During World War II, when my soon-to-be parents stayed for a while with “Grandma” Sophia, a Christian Scientist. She discovered Dudley’s basement brewery and categorically forbade Mary Baker Lager.

Environmental stick-outs. As I watched traffic in downtown Nassau, a repository of melanin, I thought “That driver looks sick!” In a moment, “Not pale, just white.” Some miles away, I was exploring the edge of Paradise Island, a resort where Marjory was attending a conference. Under a bridge this guy was jumping off a wall or whatever, disappearing, and emerging with some kind of shells. He’d hand one to a couple of girls, who’d eat the contents raw as they all chatted amiably. Watching from a bench, silent and ignored, I was struck by the way a girl’s shiny golden tooth contrasted with the morning shade of the structure, the blackness of her skin, and the elemental activity and food: an enamel-less anomaly.

Restaurant ambiance. At a Cracker Barrel, a half-dozen framed old-magazine covers make the ancient wall-telephone seem out of place. But don’t these five relics of *Popular Mechanics* (15 cents) themselves clash with the black-and-white photograph of a Dartmouth College reunion in 1923? How appropriate, moreover, does this portrait of formally dressed men seem amid the Faux Farmy? At an Italian-themed eatery, Schubert’s “Ave Maria” interrupted the perfervid arias, as well as the flaccid Deanos. One night she graced the uneaten fried squid.

Mis-sits and misfits. At a show in Branson, Missouri, I found myself trying to view the stage from behind a neck the same width as the monumental cranium. Next night, another Bighead! On a shelf amid twenty volumes of art and photography stood *Bridge for Dummies*. In the greeting-card section of a CVS, the “Sympathy” pocket offered a flamboyant “WAH-HOO!” (my re-wording modified for copyright)—the card mis-filed from “Congratulations.”

Bes’fits. (T. Hollinger, Ph.D.):

Take a group of *Rana pipiens* frogs being preyed upon by some snake. Assume the snake can spring forward a certain distance, say 24 inches. If all the frogs leap 23 inches, the snake is likely to catch his prey. But if one of the frogs for some reason can leap 26 inches, that frog is unlikely to be a dinner guest of Mr. Snake. The successful frog’s leaping prowess is due to a genetic variation, the successful frog is more likely to survive and pass on this trait to its progeny. Thus, more frogs will become good leapers, increasing their survival. In time, many frogs will be able to all leap 26 inches and will become the majority. (4)

Mispairs. Sometimes one member is clearly out of place, like these wayward wheels:
Sometimes if two items are incongruous, which is incongru-er?



Exception to “Compact Parking.”



From ramp to bumper.

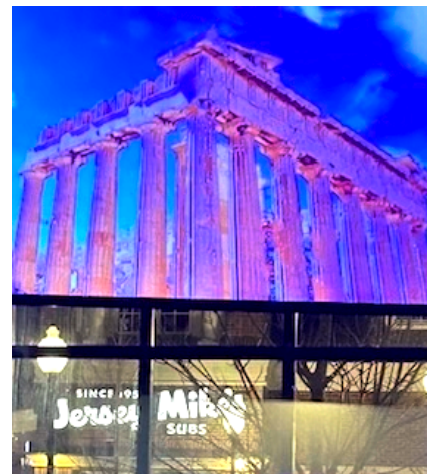
In the late 1940s, this souvenir plate hung on the dining room wall of Sophia and G.H.Capps, Sr. (S. Humphrey, Oak Park, Illinois). Now the author uses it to hold an Apple Watch.



Twenty-three years before the author's birth, under the presidency of William Howard Taft.



Wood stork and reindeer.



Or incongruent. Below this electronic photo of the Parthenon, and out the window of a Greekish restaurant, Jersey Mike carries on business in North Carolina.

Incongru-ocular:



Honey.

Incongruous Noggins:



Comely amid homely.



Author driving his fantasy-Packard. Courtesy R. Roe.

An irrational exception can be intentional. Albertus of Amsterdam (1665-1736) collected exotic samples of flora and fauna for his Cabinet of Curiosities. Delivered by tanned, salty hands, they went from ships into drawers and bottles. Eventually he commissioned detailed drawings of the specimens, which were published between 1734 and 1765 as four series of plates and entitled *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri*. However valuable for enumeration and identification, the collection “continues to make room for the peculiar, the rare and the strange.”

It is more out of curiosity than in the name of science, for instance, that a deformed baby from Curaçao, preserved in alcohol, is separately depicted. The *Thesaurus* also includes an illustration of a malformed goat with one head and two bodies (I,46). What found its way into Seba’s book was not necessarily the typical representative of a given species, but the occasional anomaly, which was certain to excite much greater interest.

The Dutchman even included a few imaginaries like “Hydra” and “Draco.” (5)



Senator Tim Kaine merrily mismatched with folk characters.
Photo by Becky Bailey Pomponio.

Incongruity can be whimsical, as when Randall has a spell of dancing in stores (Scripture 25.) And an exception can also be happy. After a film-club session at the Wellses', Ernest Lion—twice a widower and thrice an inmate of concentration camps—swung his leg over the yellow motorcycle belonging to Ray Moye (right) and laughed in glee.



What about the challenge of classifying actual human beings? Looking back on his experience as a boy in the early 1980s, S.C. Quesenberry concludes that he and his older brother are “Highly evolved trailer trash”:

We are the anomalies, and we are the ones continuously shitted on, for our interests, our competence. For some reason, they feel as if it must be snuffed out before it ignites a flame. We are considered the black sheep of this family,... but in all actuality we are two white sheep in a family of black sheep.

So his sense of incongruity gives rise to the need for a different classification. But finally he takes another step and repudiates all such typecasting or box-checking: “I don’t need to belong to anything. I am entirely self-sufficient: I am whole as is.” To adopt his lingo, he doesn’t give a flying flock. Sorting people into groups, including oneself, does risk diminishing their uniqueness, and thus their contribution to the worldly kaleidoscope. (6)

And my mother’s one-time report: “Grandpa” Capps said farewell to any responsibilities, went on an expedition in search of gold, and returned with one eye. Hence the souvenir assay kit stored in our basement.

A final grind of the mirror-filled clasheido-scope:

1. A magazine titled *Gun & Garden*, one subscriber being Mr. McGregor. Why not *Day Care & Dingo* (credit Garry Larson's cartoon, "Trouble Brewing").
2. Old people's homes with names like "Sunrise" and "Merrywood"—and the required descriptor, "vibrant."
3. Randall's jar of apple sauce—organic and without added sugar—sharing the basket with a jumbo jar of olives "for martinis."
4. A backpack unattended on a Jerusalem sidewalk.
5. In this world of multitudinous distinctions, no surprise that the two most venerated patriotic anthems of one country are waltzes. "Star-Spangled Banner" and "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." (A note from DL: These are indeed in 3/4 meter but they are not waltzes—they are marches. A 3/4 meter is but one component of a waltz.)
6. Christmas carols, which forget the cross for the creche. Not a shock because Northern-Europeans also ignore the unrecorded date of Jesus' birth and celebrate it in winter.

Randall's Alternative Carol

When John-Jesus was a little baby
Sittin' on his daddy knee,
He picked up a hammer an' a little piece o' steel,
Say "Hammer gonna be the death o' me, O Lord,
Hammer gonna be the death o' me."

Well the Gov'nor say to the carp'ter:
"Gonna bring that wood-truss around,
Gonna bring that wood-truss out on the job
Gonna whup them nails on down, O Lord
Gonna whup them nails on down."

The carp'ter say to the Gov'nor,
"A man ain't nothin' but a man,
But 'fore I let them sharp shanks drive me down
I'll die with them nails in my hand, O Lord
Die with them nails in my hand."

Well the soldiers lifted up their hammer,
Drove John-Jesus nearly deaf.
Las' words I hear John-Jesus say:
"Oh God in heaven, why you lef'? O Lord,
O God in heaven, why you lef'?"

NOTES

* “Cowabunga!” from *The Howdy Doody Show*.

** *The Moldau*. “Shenandoah” seems to refer to a person, not a river in Virginia, although some versions do refer to the Missouri River. B.

*** Florence Butt, H-E-B chain.

1. Hugh Lofting, 1922. Revised edition 1988 by Christopher Lofting. New York: Yearling/Random House Children’s Books, p. 61.



For Sam Wells. Paleontological pioneer, who is responsible for the discovery of that missing link—that photo-human transitional stage to the featherless biped (2023).

2. This photograph evoked a response from Paul Zelinsky (2023). The author had its whimsy and learning framed alongside the beach photo.

3. Sung by Dick “Two-Ton” Baker, written by Billy Faber, John Kamano, and Maurie Hartmann. A rude parallel: “Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?/With cockle shells and purple bells and one damn eggplant.” (Approximate quotation from *Mad Magazine*, 1950s.)

4. An exception can also endanger a group. Tom again:

During active duty firearm training at Fort Dix, I was impressed with the Army's method of safety training. Our rifles and pistols (our pieces) were always locked up in a special room called the armory. I think the Army had learned to have a bunch of young men carrying loaded guns around all the time was unlikely to lead to pleasant outcomes. (What could possibly go wrong!) So, while training to be 'killers' we were seldom allowed access to lethal weapons

of any kind. However, we did get lots of firearm training including weapon maintenance and marksmanship. The latter stages of training included live fire at targets. This was highly regulated and once issued bullets (the army does not give you anything, they issue you items) we were strictly controlled. One dared not to put a bullet in a piece without supervision, and discharging a piece without permission would be very dangerous. The perpetrator of such a discharge was likely to be scrubbing dishes in KP for weeks.

For example, arriving on the firing range, we would line up and proceed by a sergeant and an officer to be issued one or two clips (six bullets per clip) of live ammunition. These were not loaded into the rifles. We then marched to the firing line and once in position were instructed to 'lock and load' whatever that meant. Then after the live fire exercises were over:

1. We made sure our gun was empty and not loaded;
2. The person next to us checked that our weapon was unloaded;
3. We then marched by a sergeant who personally checked our empty weapon;
4. The next inspection was by a junior officer who made sure the sergeant had made sure and the firing partner had made sure and the weapon holder had made sure the weapon was empty;
5. The last step was putting the gun on a gun rack supervised by the armorer.

With all this attention to safety, it was only once in a while a gun fired when being placed on the rack but it still occurred. To this day I always assume every gun is loaded and assume if a gun is pointed at someone it is done to kill.

5. *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities: The Complete Plates in Color 1734-1765*. Köln: Taschen Bibliotheca Universalis, 2015, pp. 17, 194-95.

6. S.C. Quesenberry, *Caveman Supersonic: A Tale of Three Brothers. A Memoir of Southwest Virginia*. 2020. With permission. The Bible refers to humans as “sheep” more than 500 times (sheep101.info/sheepbible.html, accessed Oct. 2021). The author’s daughter, who worked on a sheep farm in France, reported that if an animal toppled over, it couldn’t right itself. Reason for the Judeo-Christian appreciation for a shepherd?

Scripture 12

The Estate III: Trespassers Welcome or Not



Annie Lane slopes & winds through October. The escapees' prison rises across the highway.

Is it a snout? Of a horse?

Marjory and I came back from a party at dusk, which in late May seemed unhurried, even reluctant to disappear over the horizon. After she drew into the carport, I decided to work off some alco-calories by plucking up more stones from a field now destined for clover. Having donned work clothes and boots, I grabbed the wheelbarrow, which carried the familiar rake, shovel, and rubber basket, turned it around—wait! Above and behind the Subaru, was that a three-dimensional shape? It resolved into something elongated and animated.

Was it not bobbing along with several other equine heads, mainly dark-colored, one of the animals a brown-and-white paint? This foursome shuffled and breathed. They made a side-view tableau like the stampede pictured on the Roper shirt I'd bought at the Floyd Country Store, and admired by the visa-checker on the *Queen Mary 2*. Already a bit dizzy, I skeptically remembered a wine called "La Linda." To make things worse—was the fourth creature an amalgam of a long-haired bison, black sheep, and mastiff?

Afraid that the sixteen legs would amble down Annie Lane a quarter mile to the highway, I phoned 911 and asked for an officer to mark the intersection with a blue light. Then I ran upstairs to get two apples and cut them into parts. By then the group had moved farther up the lane toward the woods. Flashlight in hand, I assured myself that although I might be weaving a little in the wheel-tracks, I was dealing with fact. I approached slowly, murmured sweet nothings, held out a quarter of a Red Delicious, caught a large brown eye, and persuaded its owner to reach out, test, and gobble. The others crowded around me and took shares, the largest pushing away competition, shoving me, and taking an extra slice. I was amazed by their graceful masses of musculature, the sheen of their coats, and their long, costume-like fringes. The Shetland hung back like an abject slave, so I invited it to take a piece, which it half-heartedly dropped on the ground and thus into the mouth of another.

Taken aback by the height of the other animals, I had to tilt my head to meet the eyes of the biggest. Even warm breath! But the thought of teeth and hooves kept me on guard as I moved among them talking, patting noses and flanks, biding time so as to keep them atop the ridge. I noted that they valued apples more than affection. Still under the influence of the grape, I also recalled that Bremen's horse-choristers were not horizontal but stacked, as if on their own risers.

By then my spouse had come out of the house with long carrots broken in half, and the quartet clopped toward her. Katie now brought out a second course. Then Marge held out her arms and commanded something like "Don't go any further!" but the visitors just passed around them and took off into the woods. By the time I got there, no animals, just a continual barking by several neighborhood sources. Afraid for the safety of both the herd and the people, I started to walk down to Rt. 221 with the idea of—I suppose shining the light at oncoming cars to warn drivers. On the gravel I spied a line of eight little piles that, already a bit dried, seemed to mark the original path of the escapees and to offer more evidence of reality. Nothing at the bottom of the hill, just the occasional whiz of a vehicle. I haplessly waved the beam in the eyes of one driver to warn that twenty potential hooves could soon be loping around the curve by Margie Keith's house.

Trudging back up, I heard a vehicle and turned to see headlights approaching slowly and then to read *Animal Control*. A husband and wife had come all the way from Check Community to capture the horses, only to find that they had disappeared. With the help of some kind of radio, the man learned that the owners were out of town but that someone would be arriving to take custody. Scott had already determined that the gate had been pushed open by the captives. Having parked the truck, the rescuers kept an electric bulb on and explored the area with a spotlight. As we chatted, the controller laughed to hear my report: “When I saw the shrunken Shetland, I vowed to quit drinking.” Kate and I made a second fruitless expedition to the bottom of the hill, then climbed uphill and went indoors.

“Horse!” Marge had been looking out the kitchen window, where the lights of the vehicle illuminated an animal that was tall, powerful, restrained. I walked down to talk with the genial fellow, who had attached the animal to the truck with a bridle or other curtailment. “He’s the leader—the rest will come to wherever he is.” Climbing back to the house, I returned with two Granny Smiths. “They like apples,” said Scott; “Hold your hand flat.” “He’ll be your friend forever,” added Brandi. “They’re organic,” I assured everyone. A warm breath from above charmed me, but at a sudden loud whinny in my ear, I stumbled backward.

Now the full group had mustered. Scott explained that the dark brown visitor was a bay, so I now understood what color the racehorse Stewball was *not*. (The singer bet on the wrong color.). The pony, he said, knew its place, which was at a respectful distance, although this time it did accept a portion of Grandmas. Then the headlights of another vehicle slowly made their way up, and from it emerged two grateful people who knew what to do with bridles.



The next morning I peered out the kitchen window across Annie Lane, over the trees and the invisible highway to the hill opposite, where near the small barn a brown-and-white horse grazed tranquilly in the field. Later I started to work in the yard when I spied a large plop near the garden. I shoveled it up—breaking it in half to reveal an interior of something like algae—and carried it sideways and downwind to a hole left by a plucked-up rock, a vacancy that I stuffed with souvenir.

Looking over the deck of the Cabin to the northeast, we could view a low pasture just across Dodd Creek that extended leftward to the bridge over Highway 221. One day cattle hooves turned to wheels and silence to cylinders. The mechanical din ran up our ridge along the natural amphitheater and echoed against our row of three houses. A single all-terrain vehicle was eventually joined by others as around and around they circled, after a couple of days jumping over the new sophistication of a ramp. The anvil-hammering upon ears could not be shut out. It recalled the “Abandon Ship!” clangor that ordered passengers to their muster station for practice.

Floyd County had scrapped its noise ordinance as unenforceable. In contrast, Boulder County, Colorado, declared that “the peace, health, safety and welfare of its citizens require protection from excessive, unnecessary and unreasonable noise.” There is also an unwritten law, according to Fred First:

Quietude is a prerequisite to clarity of mind and soul. We claim it as a right yet we can deny it so easily to our neighbors by our indifference. Like smoke from a careless fire, noise passes unimpeded across property lines. We can close our eyes, but we can't close our ears. (*Floyd Press*, 17 June 2010.)

Tom: "Yes, it's your own property, but keep everything on it."

Where was the military draft? I was sustained by the possibility of buying silence—greenbacks for racetrack. Sheriff's officers, phoned just before midnight, arrived with their own wheels, and a line of taillights slowly ascended the hill to Rt. 221. Paying a visit to the Law, I learned that officers would help at any time and thus act as noise control. But the Rustic Club still met on unpredictable days and continued past dusk. Decibels penetrated everywhere in the house from the basement to the upstairs bedroom, located opposite the new recreation area. I imagined stringing a wire across the path of the four-wheelers, as someone had done to a horse in *The White Ribbon* (film of 2009). Not religious, I couldn't pray for lightning.

Once, as I walked down the Lane with Andrea, I told her (loudly) that we might put the Cabin up for sale, and she wept. Yet who would buy a house with no quiet, like no water? Although our neighbors drove around the area and could still hear the racket a mile away, they counseled waiting things out. The riparian land was now well-plowed by tires and the air was polluted by exhaust. I began to have stomach trouble that no pill could cure, not even a solitary side-trip to South Carolina.

As time went on, the charging around seemed less frequent and eventually ceased, like an invasion of flying insects. Racetrack faded into pasture, and silence fell like rain after drought. But the scenery would always be provisional, so a few times, when we heard a chainsaw near The Estate, we flinched.

Scripture 13

From Wolf to Woof

St. Thomas Aquinas gave credit to God for producing many and diverse creatures. But human beings created the dog out of its Grandmother-gulping genetic predecessor, the wolf. Now this Canid with its many subspecies and owners—has a problematic relationship with *Homo sapiens*.

Dogs of war.

In 1943, Ernest Lion and his new wife Liesel climbed out of the railed prison to the platform at Auschwitz. They were surrounded by SS military with pointed machine guns: “German shepherd dogs were at the ready to attack, flashing their fangs and leaning hard into the leashes.” (1)

In 1944, Slovakia, the extended family of eight people and three generations split into two groups, one on each side of the Ondava River, miles apart from each other. They walked back and forth many times from September to December. As remembered in 2008 by Alzbeta Kačmarova Moeringer, born 1928:

We had a dog that used to come with us [named Bobi, a Siberian Husky.] It disappeared for two days and came back and then stayed for two days, and then went back again [gestures] and then came back. I thought, “I bet he has gone to see my parents.” So I wrote a letter and put it on his neck. It was a black dog, I found a black—like this pocketbook—tar paper and I made what looks like a collar, and he disappear and delivered that letter to my mother and my father through the German and Russian front. That thing was full of mines, and we didn’t know how he went because two days later he came back with the answer from my mother and my father that they were alive. They had to move to another village from where they were because they were too close to the front. That is why we went to the woods because my sister was too close to the front.

It was not only my mother and my father that wrote but a Russian general who wanted information on a German occupation over here, but they warn us to be very very careful because we could get shot. Who cares already [throws hands up in air], so I just wrote everything that was on the German side because I used to dig those foxholes every place we had to go and dig them. You know you were holding the shovel and you go with the shovel.

So the dog went... and two days later he came again with information from the general, who’s name was Klapalek—I even have a picture of his bust at the cemetery where he was buried with his soldiers. [Photograph in the document.] This dog went back and forth three times. [For example she told the general that there were a lot of Germans in Mlymarovce—Zamarovce, in the Trenčín district of northwestern Slovakia. The village of Mestisko was empty. On the east side her father—like Ernest Lion’s, a decorated veteran of World War I, went with the general and told him every place of importance.]

The Russians destroyed the German occupation and then in a couple of day they just left. The war wasn't finished yet but we came and stayed in six houses. All of a sudden this dog came and he was wounded. But he came right to me and started to cry—and I tried to put a bandage on his shoulder—his skin was cracked and hanging. He just turned around, I patted him and talked to him and he went outside. And I never saw him again. He knew it wasn't what it used to be. (2)



As a three-or-four-year old in the winter of 1945-46, I looked just past my galoshes at the snow-covered sidewalk. What is that? A puddle of urine! Its yellow, oily blotch contrasted with the ambient whiteness. And its luminosity seemed incongruous under the matte gray clouds. Might there be another blot? Lifting my gaze down the roughly-shoveled sidewalk toward Newton, I beheld another dribble in a pile of cast-off snow. Unfamiliar with the concept “extrapolate,” I wondered if there could be yet another. Tilting my head I spied one—smaller because farther away—then another. Perhaps this chain of stains forecast my later ambivalence about this animal and its owners.*

Dogs shared our childhood.

In the postwar years, dogs shared our childhood. During first grade I learned to read with the help of Spot (*Dick and Jane*). On a magical trip from Illinois to the West Coast to visit my dad's father, I glimpsed a Saint Bernard at a mountain lodge and immediately fell upon its bulk with a hug, a sensation that I still recall fondly. On the radio beginning in 1950, the Sergeant Preston had King, and television's Buster Brown had Tige, who resided in leather. During one film, a collie was the first to learn from Edmund Gwenn that the mistress had died. Little black and white Scotty-magnets repelled each other. My mother told me that since people favor books about Abraham Lincoln, physicians, and dogs, the best seller would be *Lincoln's Doctor's Dog*.

I felt a kinship with Stupe, a fellow neighborhood-criss-crosser. Patiently affectionate, he would allow me to pat his flank, and I can still hear the light thumping, feel the tickle of his black curls. I once read how to approach a dog—i.e., with the back of the hand slowly extended in front of and below the nose to allow a probationary sniff—and I did so many times, often feeling warm breath and sometimes a moist nose.



Richland, Washington June 1950.

But since pets could run free, feces abounded in various stages of dissolution, including mysterious dry-white turds, perhaps of spirit animals. My brothers and I caught pinworms, no doubt from playing in the contaminated grass, the tickles themselves now cavorting in the gut, so we had to get enemas and take gentian violet. When Cap choked on one such pill, my father hauled him upside down and whopped his back to dislodge it.

As a boy I once heard my mother announce that somebody had poisoned a neighbor's dog. I was incredulous. "Why?!" She looked up from her mystery, thought for a moment, and explained that the animal might have dug up a garden or barked too much. "There it goes again," she declared another time in exasperation. I looked out the kitchen window to the flower garden, where an alien beast was dragging itself along: "Its back legs are paralyzed and they won't put it to sleep."

The next-door neighbors on one side owned Nicky, whose coat disturbed me with its bare, pink, scabby places. On the other side was Vicky, who provided my first job. While the couple were seeing their daughter in California, I went down to the basement every day for two weeks, fed the animal, and scraped up its piles with a shovel.

My pal Bob down the street had a short, stiff-legged dog. The cutesie name "Bootsie" seemed inappropriate because every time I visited, the animal had to be collared and restrained behind the kitchen door, which it scratched insanely while trying to get a slippery-clickety purchase on the linoleum. (At that age I couldn't diagnose a Gratuitous Paroxysm of Hostility.) Yet my friend cared enough for his pet that, when we took an un-countenanced jaunt to Aurora on the electric train, he ducked into a butcher shop, asked for a bundle of cast-off bones, and stood holding the bloody newspapers between cars.

Over on the corner of Hawthorn and Prairie, my schoolmate Stan's boxer would rush the back door in a snorting, snout-frothing frenzy. His mother would yell in despair, "Sandy is out!" and we would dash around the yard trying to catch it. My own family got a Cocker Spaniel named Creampuff, who bit a policeman to death (the dog's). One Cocker even had national political influence in 1952 when VP candidate Richard Nixon acknowledged having a secret election fund but vowed to keep Checkers—part of his own strategy for survival.



“Whose dog is that?!”

As a twelve-year-old in 1954, sitting cross-legged on the wagon, I turn to peer over the back. Luke, a Gordon Setter, has followed me a half mile. Holding the reins, the wizened farmer declares, “He’ll nip the horses—you gotta take him back.” I jump out from among the other sixth-graders and sprint west on Linden to its T-intersection with Kenilworth across from Tommy Hollinger’s house. Leaning to the left, I race south past Hawthorn to Cottage, then lean left again and secure the animal in our yard. Sprinting back to turn on Linden, I behold paved emptiness.

Remembering that the wagons or sleighs go northward, I put my tennis shoes to work again, run back to Kenilworth, turn right this time, and continue past Oak to Elm. Once there, I know that the rides either turn right or continue to the countryside. If only it were a sleigh with its snow-packed tracks! Not spotting the rolling party, I run north for fifteen minutes, passing Oak and Elm, even the almost-highway of Geneva Rd. Nearly reaching almost reaching St. Charles Rd., I survey what I can see of it to the right between houses. I decide to start cutting through backyards and run parallel to it. Although in good shape, I must stop to catch my breath and tend to a pain in my side. I continue to jump over weeds and to dodge trees, bushes, leaf-piles, and laundry-line poles, always keeping an eye out for jam-packed, laughing schoolmates to my left.

Finally I give up on eastward at Western. I sit on a curb bent over a knife in my gut. My head echoes with a mocking clip-clop, clip-clop. After a while I manage to stand up and make my way along the sidewalk to Hawthorn, where I make a right and limp up the slope, over the sled-crest, and down to Newton. Then a left to Cottage Ave., then a right up the home sidewalk.



Sam and soccer-playing Honey.



Like a Member of the Family.

Christians have a challenge to rank homo sapiens among mammals. Are they independent and intelligent or baa-baa ruminant? The dog offers a similar quandary. In *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World*, Michael Pollan notes that the wolf seems more impressive than the pet; “Yet there are fifty million dogs in America today, only ten thousand wolves.”

So what does the dog know about getting along in this world that its wild ancestor doesn't? The big thing the dog knows about—the subject it has mastered in the ten thousand years it has been evolving at our side—is us: our needs and desires, our emotions and values, all of which it has folded into its genes as part of a sophisticated strategy for survival. (3)

Tell me those eyes aren't "Pet-me" pimping.

A few testimonials.

Stranger: Nice shirt.

Author: My daughter gave it to me. But usually I have to buy my own shirts because no one really loves me.

Stranger: You must not have a dog.

Poster with photograph of a huggable pooch: "God said I will send them without wings so no one will suspect they are angels" (declaration more Pinterest than Proverbs).

Comic strips: In one Sunday section of twenty-four strips, eight pictured a dog (*Roanoke Times*, May 1, 2022).

Romance: (A) "I was longing for a woman," reports Bill Conk, "with hairy legs, love in her eyes, and not much talk." (B) Soon after our friend's divorce, she reported with amusement how her canine pal would sit in the passenger seat and rest a proprietary foreleg on the window ledge.

Although the Toltecs called themselves People of the Dog, the Aztecs regarded it as Man's Best Food. Harry A. Frank, 1904: "All at once there burst upon me the recollection that I had seen neither a dog nor a cat all that day in Venice." (4)

European-influenced people seem to be of two minds about the species: *Running Dog* and *Lapdog* are like name tags; anything or anyone despicable can be a *dog*; to *dog* someone is to hound them; *Dog-patch* was the down-and-out setting of *Li'l Abner*, a cartoon series by Al Capp. Yet in France, Tulipe may warm a cushion at a restaurant and Gaston may even cling to the back of a ski. In the U.S.A., a friend's Dandie Dinmont Terrier receives the gift of an outworn slipper from Randie and eventually chews it up. In China? People might keep a dog as a pet—but "Not in the house!" exclaimed a waitress as she swept out an imaginary critter. But according to her restaurant's placemat, anyone born in the Year of the Dog is loyal and honest and works well with people. After an Arab dictator was deposed, a man sold German Shepherds in front of his house as an insult, yet someone purchased them.

We humans may like to close the gap between species, perhaps to recover a sense of long-lost genetic kinship. The author even scratches the head of a farm animal down the road from the stone angel, even though at



Jane Cundiff with River and Durga, 2021.

first encounter he didn't know what it was. He tends to pet any wagger, maybe give a gentle tug to its ears, sometimes while uttering friendly syllables and avoiding a sloppy-warm tongue.

In this world of stoney reality, a creature that brings harmless comfort deserves credit. This animal can be a delight for children, a shared pleasure for couples, and an ice-breaker between walkers: "Is that a labradoodle?" Or "It's a vizsla, a Hungarian dog." Against the cold night, the author's niece in Minnesota supplements blankets with twelve furry legs. What a blessing to someone whose home might otherwise resemble a still-life painting. "I'm so grateful for my animals," declared Jennifer; "Otherwise I would never laugh." Affection toward them can be touching: "When our old dog went deaf," reported Libby, "we wondered if he wondered why we stopped talking to him." But the author has his limits, as when Jane invited the Wellses to a party and added that the "doggies" would be wearing Christmas bows. "I'm coming," he replied, "anyway."

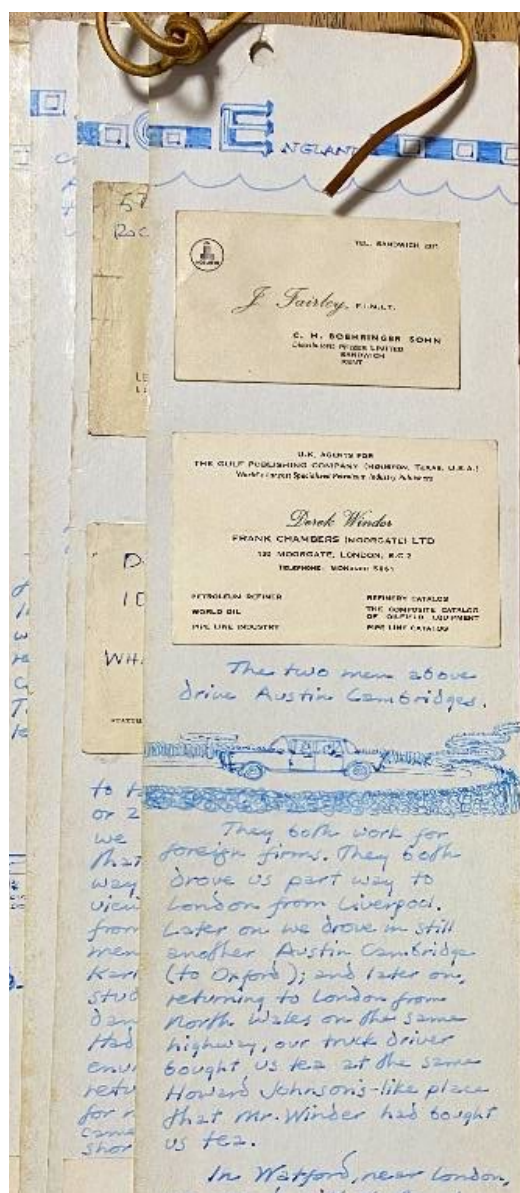
Sometimes people might appreciate this species partly because it's *not* human. For although a dog can "speak," it can't lie, nag, make cutting remarks, or even use a sarcastic tone. It might sulk but can't be snide. Yet does the phrase "animal companion" not blur the uniqueness of human ones, with all their complex rewards and strains? This friend can catch a Frisbee but not a joke, and friends don't lick us, sniff our crotches, or roll in road-skunk.

Dog-lovers often invest the animal with a significance that would not prevail in the courtroom of logic. "Never say anything uncomplimentary about another person's dog," advises Rule 603 of *Life's Little Instruction Book, Volume II*. (5) Maybe a pet dog should be named "Ambassador-without-Portfolio"—i.e. as a trotting, panting, wagging, barking manifestation of one's identity. After thirty years, Mr. Bojangles still grieved. "When I get to heaven, first thing I'll do," promises one singer, "is grab my horn & call for Blue." Owners often confer people-names upon dogs, so why not "Barclay"? One neighbor's pet answered to *Chloe*, an insult to a lovely barista in Floyd. A friend of the author's remembers walking on campus:

I heard and saw a pretty blonde a couple hundred feet away, calling "Ralph!" "Ralph!" My heart palpitated, and I quickly headed in that direction, when from another one a Golden Retriever beat me to the punch and ran up to her—and she gave him a big hug" (R. Roe).

Out of the wolf came more breeds than did products from the oleoresin of the longleaf pine before the era of petroleum. But although many types were bred for specific tasks, nowadays most dogs are retired the day they are born. Moreover, according to Jane, a single American dog uses more earthly resources than one Ethiopian human. And when the pet ages, gets a hip problem, some owners spend a lot of money to postpone bones-in-the-backyard. Money that could go to a child with a stomach problem called hunger—something never experienced by a pet with a grocery aisle to itself.

In the summer of 1962, I spent a day indoors with Stupe himself, whose owners were reluctant to leave him alone in case of a house fire. While my companion napped, I fashioned a scrapbook of a recent seven-month-long expedition: cutting several sheets of white shirt-cardboard in half lengthwise, I tied them together with a rawhide knot at one end and Voilà! A handwritten chronology, eight blue-pen-and-ink sketches, and twenty business cards, their scribbled-upon back-sides visible through a cutout.



Stupe a-Snooze, the Scrapbook Muse.
Business cards from two Englishmen who
picked up two hitchhikers.

Four years later, downtown in Wyoming, my housemate urged me to turn around, and I met the gaze of a half-Cocker Spaniel in a pet-store window. This sheet of undifferentiated silicate, cooled and crystalized, could not block affection. As the new owner, I had to leave Huey indoors, thoughtlessly, and once I returned to a television lying cracked on its side as well as my roommate's fractured, extra-tall bottle of wine. I reimbursed him, but when he borrowed my car and a pair of canines chased each other into it, they left a scrape that rusted me into the lower class.

On Huey's evening walk, he would shudder a deposit onto the frozen parkway. (Who has not polished a shoe with Fidola? Once I stepped out of our motorhome, vehicle of choice for dog-owners, and just missed a brown cairn, one of innumerable piles that mark a trail all over the world.) During another walk I saw my sweet animal bolt into an intersection and almost get run over, so as soon as I could breathe again I gave Huey away. Yet when a collarless dog appeared at the door trembling and sneezing, I provided a box-bed inside, my rewards being immeasurable gratitude and a terrible cold.

Then in North Carolina the short-haired "Whitey," as I called him, used to follow me up the sandy path of Chapel Hill. I petted him and enjoyed his nearby trotting. But one day he darted into a spinning hubcap, bounced off, and ran away. I knocked on the door of the owner, who expressed disbelief, and the dog reappeared the next day or so as a rebuff to me, the busybody. One evening as I rode up that same hill in a friend's car, a Saint Bernard yanked its leash away

and crashed into the right front hubcap. Although it was only stunned, apparently unhurt, the owners angrily rebuked the driver, who had stopped in concern.

A woman in our apartment complex enjoyed her pet, and once when she dressed it in a hat and maybe a scarf, we shared a laugh. But soon, when I walked over to the hillside path, the dog began to come after me, head lowered and teeth bared! After I complained, the animal was tethered—only to drag its rope-and-stake pedestrian-ward. After I had clapped it away on two occasions, feeling the hair on my arms rise, I called the police, and the dog disappeared. Now the owner rang me up every half hour—"Bastard!"—a practice halted by the phone company.

One day in an elevator I complained to someone about how owners tended to value their dogs over people. Her face hardened: "If my dog and a person were both drowning, I don't know

which one I would save.” When the door slid open, out she huffed. Grateful for my ability to swim, I was nevertheless shocked. Her reaction was not only callous toward her own species but also ironic, for as an African American, her ancestors had been considered lower than humans and listed as possessions along with animals. (6)

When Marjory and I tried to settle in South Carolina, things began inauspiciously when a neighbor asked if I had seen his black Lab. “No, sorry.” “I’ve seen you petting it. They’ll follow you if you pet ‘em. That’s bad dog-etikwette.” A friend from Mississippi gave Marge a beautiful Cocker Spaniel puppy. Once as I swam in the dark Waccamaw behind our house, the animal jumped off the pier and paddled toward me. During thunderstorms I would hug its trembles, and we would play yank-the-rag as both of us went *grrr-r* as the whites of my competitor’s eyes threatened fiercely. “She was always there whenever I came back from taking call at night,” Marge remembers fondly. The turf-conscious dog, however, did not welcome everyone. A young man rang our doorbell and, in agitation, reported that the animal had scared his little brother by running up at him and barking. Expressing disbelief, I nevertheless apologized and assured him (and myself) that Moonbeam was no Bootsie.

That Wyoming stray finally tracked me to South Carolina after a decade. Still rangy, thin, and collarless, it wandered up and down the road and around the yards while the resident canines made a fracas. Once, after a few wags, evoked a scrap of bread. After the bulge in its throat disappeared, I coaxed it to me, patted it, and spoke a few words. Next morning the dog lay curled on my front porch. I tried to appear unfriendly and, after the squatter had remained a few hours, gruffly commanded it to “Get movin’!”—only to see the tail swing back and forth. As Saadi wrote, “A dog will never forget the crumb thou gavest him, though thou mayst afterwards throw a hundred stones at his head.”

Perhaps things would have turned out different if Marjory and I had not already owned a healthy pet. I took it for a walk every day, when the animal’s golden hair would fluff in the breeze as she ran through both lawn and field nosing for adventure. This time the stray came along and followed at my pace while the thoroughbred meandered about us. The interloper had to sit down every now and then to claw its flank, self-prescribed treatment for an advanced case of mange.

From that time on, I feared for Moonbeam. The alternatives: tolerate the stray and risk an expensive, maybe futile, treatment for my own pet; lay out money to cure an animal that belonged to an irresponsible someone else; or keep the trespasser away. Ashamed of my contradictory messages, I began to stomp, clap, and yell. But the dog had apparently settled upon its last chance. One day I shook a rock in a big can to scare it, but when the clatter stopped, back it drifted, although remaining at a distance. The animal seemed unconscious of its patron only while scratching: no longer of this world, it would twist awkwardly and claw away at its thin torso. This beast I both pitied and detested. “You ask too much. There are too many dogs around here already, and no one else will take you in, either. Why can’t you just trot on and suffer elsewhere, maybe get out of your misery by a speeding car? How do you think I feel about denying comfort to the mistreated.” *Scratch, scratch, scratch.*

About this time I threw the can at him and wondered where the energy came from to run. Then he slunk back, head abased, eyes cast up humbly and furtively, tail wagging tentatively. The mutt now actually seemed to smile apologetically: “I know I’m ugly and beset with disease, and have

nothing to offer. I can't demand a thing. You're the one, that's all. I'm sorry it's come to this and I don't hold anything against you. We must play our parts."

Embarrassed about throwing things, unhappy about the nonverbal tail, and concerned about germs on the front mat, I called the police. An officially-labeled sedan arrived and the officer opened the trunk. When he expressed concern lest the dog bite, I replied almost defensively, "No, no!" He held up the core of an apple that he'd been munching and coaxed the animal to the bumper. Wrapping my arms around its patchy fur and straining, I lifted it into the trunk as it gingerly took the core. Although apprehensive, it nevertheless settled into the hold as the lid shut with care. As the light narrowed and disappeared, the captive, holding the fruit in its mouth, lost any vestige of innocence.

After I complained about a next-door neighbors' noisy dog, they gave me a tour of poop-piles on their side of the fence, so I kept the digestive tract tied to an elevated wire near a doghouse. Sometimes, however, I let Moonbeam run loose when I was around. One night a few shrieks! They drew me to the side of our little-traveled road, where the animal lay, and as I felt its warm side, the last life widdled out. I had to give the news to a tearful Marge. As further punishment I shoveled out a hole under pine needles.

The mouth of Man's Best Friend is filled with forty-two reminders of its ancestor.

In rare cases, the species has attacked its owner. Our neighbor in Virginia took a pair of half-grown boxers for a walk that ended with a ride in an ambulance. (7) In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyon (Part I, 1678), a great barking dog scares the women and children as they approach the allegorical gate of prayer. "Nor durst they for a while dare to knock any more, for fear the mastiff [i.e., the Devil] should fly upon them."

A bite is usually a surprise rather than a threat. Brother Greg leaned over a neighbor's dachshund, Nipper, and arose with a punctured, swollen, black-and-blue cheek that provoked a small lawsuit. Once while running along the sidewalk at the corner of Hawthorn and Western, I felt a sharp pain in my leg, stopped, and recognized a snout through the wide-gapped wooden fence. After my report the animal found itself muzzled.

Each spring In South Carolina I would take Andrea with me to peddle brooms for the Lions Club. One evening when a front door began to open, a heavy dog crashed out the door and rammed into her. When we left, I heard a plaintive "He *bit* me." The owner, a physician, apologized and examined her stomach right then as well as the next day in his office, finding no serious damage (but overlooking permanent fear). Not to forget a dog's law: Katie returned from that weekend train trip with a bruised cheek and a scabbed lip, the cut the same width as a nail, the scar disappearing only after a few years. Once when Andrea was riding her bike in front of me, a small dog came running out at her, and I could only watch as she swerved toward the mailbox that could lacerate her milk-fed cheek and send her smashing to the ground. She barely missed it, not only then but over and over in my memory. Pedestrian or cyclist is a moving target for upper and lower fangs.



Less fortunate was my pal Stan, whose parents owned the manic-scrambling boxer (as well as the Manhattan apartment some years later). A successful commercial and artistic photographer, he was riding a speed-bike downhill when two dogs ambushed him from behind a hedgerow. One of them caused him to tumble over the handlebars to the trauma ward, where he spent two weeks. A rib had punctured a lung, which hemorrhaged profusely and required forty full-plate X-rays. He suffered a life-threatening concussion even with a helmet, and the blow from the pavement crushed his shoulder blade to a degree that the orthopedic surgeon had seen only on deceased patients. He was presented with bills for twenty-two physicians. *Whose dog was that?* A prominent citizen's in the legal community, so a lawsuit was deemed futile. The family re-established themselves in another state.



“And if that puppy dog don’t bark / Papa’s gonna buy you a horse & cart.”

Like the Crayola is this canid: for it has splintered into innumerable participants, from Dinmont to Dimmutt. Likewise its vocal specialties, which range from an explosive-grating bass to frequency so high that it Herz. No wonder that von Biber (1644-1704) omitted this species in his musical imitation of animals. Psalm 59.6 pleads with God for help against the heathen, who go round about the city making a noise like a dog. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Beatrice tries to one-up Benedick: “I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me” (I.1). Such noise is hard to ignore—like a baby’s squall (self-preserving rhetoric), a leaf-blower (paint-off-blast), a boom-box (Irrational Public Radio), or a motorcycle (often decibellied). It persists like a headache or guilt.

An externality originates on one property but affects another. The bark is a negative type—i.e., a detriment to a neighbor. Other examples are smoke from burning garbage; a home business that parks vehicles outside or requires foot traffic in an apartment building. “What’s that?!” exclaimed Jim Henderson as he said goodnight outside our house. An eight-foot-high wooden cross had materialized across the street: spotlighted, decorated with plastic roses, it rose over the cement effigies of rabbit and angel.

Barking can even emanate from one hotel room into another while the owners are out. In a condominium complex, why not bring two small dogs that bark while you take the full-size one for a walk? Do you live in a city? Why not get a big dog as a four-legged stand-in for the countryside—like a Trail 25 backpack ordered from REI that contains an imaginary thousand acres of forest. And why not a second dog as company for the first? Pee left on snow, on grass, or tree will dry, liquify again, and run into the gutter with rain or snowmelt.

In television documentaries by Ken Burns, the camera slow-pans over a photograph of yesteryear’s town along with a faraway, dubbed-in barking. But a living citizen must contend with today’s larynx. Bowser can warn of a dangerous trespasser, but more likely the culprit is a squirrel, a delivery truck, a neighbor weeding the yard, or another dog, so the pet is itself the thief.

Motto of a magazine called *Bark*: “My dog is my co-pilot.” When such hairy aviators landed near the Roes’ house in suburban California, Ralph nicknamed each one:

Yipper (house on left): rat terrier, high pitched yips. **Yapper**: small Pomeranian, medium-pitch yaps. **Yelper**: medium dog, low-pitch normal barks. This trio loved to stand on top of sofa next to picture window, watching for any person walking by to bark at. The rat-dog would jump up and down while barking. Unceasing, even when the owners and their teenage kids were at home, which I never understood. The barking hurt my ears even when the dogs were inside and the windows closed.

Barbara Boxer (house behind): Boxer, barked less but a large dog with a lower pitch.

Joe Boxer, her twin. They would jump up on a garden bench, then stretch to look over the fence whenever I was working in my yard. They stopped barking when I talked to them. Hard to focus on gardening. Would bark when I went back inside.

Woofers 1 (house on right): dark brown Rottweiler with a deep, menacing bark and a mean look. **Woofers 2**: ditto. This one would eye me as if thinking of lunch.

Surround 1 (house behind previous house): mystery dog that I never saw, but would always bark after the Rottweilers wound up (like an echo).

The Roes investigated an acre for sale in Virginia by stomping around and making noise. They eventually enjoyed “hearing only the faint sounds from a donkey, horses, goats, and cows.” (8)

Why do dogs bark so inanely? According to *How Come? Planet Earth*, animals become more cub-like and babyish when they are bred to be more docile—foxes, for example. Scientists think that’s what happened naturally to wolf-dogs, who were rewarded for being agreeable. Adult wolves rarely bark, and just on business. (9)

As early as the eighth grade I first became aware of such an adult puppy. It was a tiny, long-haired breed (call it a Yapillion) that our widowed friend next door would put outside in the evening. One night as I tried to fall asleep so I could rise early for my paper route, the constant, high-pitched reports drove me to run outside in my pajamas as if to strangle the animal. But I settled for an in-the-snout “Shut up!” Years later Marge and I, about to leave Illinois for North Carolina, had no choice but to listen to a German Shepherd serenade the night. After I called the police, a drunk phoned to predict that something bad would happen to me before I moved.

In our first South Carolina house the next-door neighbors kept their dog outside, and when they were at work, it frequently sang a barcarole. After I expressed my concern and noted that the animal had no cover from the rain—wait! The noise actually stopped, and gratitude endured. But such cooperation is as rare as an alarm clock on the Appalachian Trail. One of our carpenters in Virginia reported a conversation with her otherwise admirable friend. “Why don’t you leave your barking dogs inside while you work? They disturb the whole neighborhood.” “I don’t care.”

Next to our second house in South Carolina people moved in with hunting dogs that not only barked but dug under their cage and ran about tearing up our yard. Complaints were vain. Andrea remembers how the man, perhaps brewed-up, once pounded on our front door: “I’m glad you didn’t let him in.” The second policeman to answer a call uncharitably deemed the pack “nigger

dogs” and hoped they had not motivated the For Sale sign. They had. After we’d built another house and enjoyed some years amid Southern pines, maples, bays, great-flowering Gordonia trees, and overhead-hanging blueberry bushes, what should a new neighbor unload but four or five dogs.

The large ebony one would charge with fangs as if to tear-up the chain-link fence, so I had to avoid that area of the yard. Although the owner claimed to hate barking, these held forth often. In nice weather they forced me to close the tentatively-opened window while I wrote in my journal, or to retreat from the cool screened porch. I hired someone to install an electric plug outside so it could power a noise-detector. This device beeped shrilly whenever the pack carried on near the fence—immediate punishment that helped until lightning caused the machine to sound for a couple of hours. Broken, down it went. This situation did not fall under magistrate’s purview because it wouldn’t allow an arrest. After a few years, one of the animals died, according to the Notice of Decease appended to the street-side mailbox.

The owner once expressed fear that a third neighbor’s animal would cause her a nervous breakdown. Before they had moved in, Marge warned this couple from church that I could not tolerate barking, but they seemed unimpressed.

One Sunday morning I wrote a note, stuck it on their mailbox, and took my anger on a long hike. The owner deemed my letter *nasty*—and I had indeed called the pet “Sparky” after the eye-patched Dalmatian on the billboard of an eponymous tourist trap. We attempted a rapprochement. They reminded me that when the previous owners told them I detested the industrial-quality bug-zapper, they had removed the Orville Redenpopper.

Percussive spells continued even after two visits from the animal control officer. Several complaints did persuade the owners to put a little box on the animal’s collar that would emit a tiny shock at a bark, but the effort was desultory and brief—dog was too old, etc. Often the owners had to spend the weekend on family missions and leave the animal to croon. They invited Marge to put the offender in their laundry room if it held forth while they were gone, and she did so once, but the offer was never repeated for reasons we enjoyed guessing. I purchased a second-hand videotape camera, and while Greg was visiting, he and I filmed the show over the fence and mailed the tape around the corner.

One night I frantically drove to a convenience store for a massive bar of chocolate, intending to sicken the animal enough to warn the owners. Having unwrapped the cocoa-plank to avoid both a crinkling and a shiny reflection, I slouched between our backyards, staying out of the light cast from a pole, and tossed it ’way over the fence. Next day, no change. I was unwilling to shoot the beast, as more than one person urged—and a beagle-plagued colleague warned me not to do it after researching the law. Certainly with no painful antifreeze or ground glass. Another night I tossed the insomniac a ball of hamburger laced with a few half-hearted sleeping pills, but if the dog died, the bark lived on. I ended up pounding a For Sale sign into erstwhile Eden.

After years in a condo, we moved to The Estate, our ridge top-refuge. For two years, however, it was intermittently compromised by a Great Pyrenees. About this breed one farmer spoke admiringly: “There’s coyotes around here [Tennessee], and there’s other animals, and they will keep any predator away. Just their bark alone.... Just the bark, it’s just a deep thing. They guard me, too.” (10)

“My Old Blue he’s a good ol’ hound / Hear ‘im buglin’ miles around.”



So whose dog *is* that?

As humans slowly domesticated the wolf, it became “manifold and divided” into almost 170 breeds. The animal has also provoked a variety of responses from its creator: responsibility either discharged or abdicated; affection, admiration, carelessness, even cruelty. It has provided meat, skilled labor, entertainment, company, affection, and protection for owners. Yet besides violating the persons and property of others, it has caused many owners to go deaf.

Look skyward with me! There, at the constellation Canis Major, shines the “Great Dog” But does Sirius, the brightest star in the heavens, not have a faintly jaundiced cast?



NOTES

* From the owner of a rental condo in Stowe, Vermont. “Allowing pets was always a heated topic at the resort meetings, especially in the winter! Pet owners preferred to have their beloved animals with them, but others always voted it down because of the ‘yellow spots’ along the walkways. Not very welcoming for owners and guests who came for a ski vacation.” (Elizabeth Grob, by email, July 2025.)

1. *The Fountain at the Crossroad*, p. 41.

2. Interview arranged by Prof. Randall A. Wells on behalf of students in Advanced Composition. It was conducted by Prof. Darla Domke-Damant, filmed by Mr. David Parker, transcribed by Ms. Carol Stenger, underwritten by Prof. Eldred Prince, Jr. (Chair, Department of History), and edited by R. Wells after several conferences with Mrs. Moehringer. The Director of the Coastal Carolina University’s Information Center held a reception in honor of Elizabeth, whose daughter lived in Conway, SC. The full document of sixteen pages is the holdings of the university.

3. New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2002, pp. xvi-xvii. By permission. (Book handed to R. Wells by T. Hollinger.)

4. Harry A. Franck. *A Vagabond Journey Around the World; A Narrative of Personal Experience*. New York: The Century Company, 1920, p. 55.

5. By H. Jackson Brown, Sr. Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 1993.

6. Bequeathed to a son: “one Negro man by the name of Harry—and also one mare & two cows & calves and one bed and furniture.” Will of Arthur Alford of South Carolina Horry District 1827 (hchsonline.org/wills).

7. What do you get when you cross a pit bull with a collie? A dog that rips your leg off and then runs for help. (anvari.org/shortjoke/Jokes_Cate/867_q-what-do-you-get-when-you-cross-a-pit-bull-with-a-collie.html, accessed July 2022.)

8. Personal communication. For a poem on a neighbor’s hairy barker, read Billy Collins’ “Another Reason I Don’t Keep a Gun in my House.” poemhunter.com For an inventory of canine habits: “I Wanna Be a Dog,” by Charlotte Diamond. Film version on YouTube.

9. Kathy Wollard, illustrated by Debra Solomon. New York: Workman, 1999, p. 134.

10. Sandra Filetti Riner. In Nancy Withington Bell, *Clinch Mountain Girls: 24 Women Grow Veggies, Animals, and a Community*. Jan-Carol, 2022, pp. 131-32.

Historical Note: Two dogs make cameo appearances in what may be the most important movie ever made—a 46-second documentary of workers leaving the Lumière factory in Lyon. One animal darts into view from the left only to double back from a moving bicycle; another trots across the bottom of the screen by ears, back, and tail. 1895. *La Sortie de l’Usine à Lyon*. Lumière brothers, 1895. Available on YouTube. Thanks go to Andrea Vasaune.

Scripture 14

D & M IV: Subjective, Overlapping, Combining, Shifting, Serial, and Illogical

The Secular Express covers nary an inch of ground, yet it will now roll along a winding narrow-gauge track of logic amid mountaintop plantations that grow coffee plants. Their varieties are cloud-cooled with notes of coal.

Question 1. Whether a classification can avoid subjectivity.

Not until there's a synonym for cinnamon. Until a kahuna presides at the wedding of a kachina and kumari. Until a Virginian in solitary confinement actually resides in "restorative housing." Until Rachel Maddow on MSNBC wears earrings or Alexa wears perfume. So for Gospel Truth, best to read *Consumer Reports*.

Or to trust the author viewpoints. *Tea* is best defined as *not coffee*, and weak coffee ditto. Smooth (not chunky) peanut butter should be served only before an execution. The author's neighbor-boy, who styles himself "Landon," is really "Longwood." The following words compose a natural group: *blandishments*, *banishments*, *revenants*, *ruminants*, *dreams*, *peas*, *beans*, and *barley oats*.

Other questions allow debate. Rapture or Capture? Ask the person who has just been *harpazō'd*. Like the driver in Myrtle Beach, S.C, whom a crash sent flying over a bridge into the Intracoastal Waterway and left him clinging to the bank naked.

How many Gospels are there, anyway? How many appearances did Jesus make after his entombment? Must the following be considered heresies? Gnosticism, Montanism, Sabellianism, Macedonianism, Apollinarianism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Arianism, and Pelagianism. (The last—man can save himself—is defied by any responsible swimmer.) Thomas Jefferson apparently believed in God and heaven, and venerated the ethical teaching of Jesus, yet his version of the New Testament ended: "There laid they Jesus: and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed." (1) When it comes to religious questions, the only objective arbiter may be Our Lady of Medjugorje.

Yes, any attempt to order the world involves a degree of bias—personal or cultural. George and Martha Washington took it as unbelievable effrontery when Ona Judge escaped. For people at war, belief is the major weapon. *The Skin of our Teeth*, by Thornton Wilder, 1942 (his ellipses):

Antrobus: In our memorial service yesterday we did honor to all our friends and relatives who are no longer with us, by reason of cold, earthquakes, plagues and... and... *coughs*... differences of opinion.

(Randall thanks J. Albright for tickets to this play).

To a buyer, a car's color might be tan, but to the seller, *California sand*. In France the author matter-of-factly called Algeria a former colony, but to someone expelled from that homeland in 1968 retorted: "Ça me vexe! Un *département*!"

Should people love their country? The nation state is pretty much an arbitrary construction, so if Patagonia secedes from both Chile and Argentina, would its citizens sing as if to Handel's "Alleluia":

PA-ta-gonya!
PA-ta-gonya!
Pata-GON-ya, Pata-GONya
Pata-GO-OH-OH OHN—YA!

Opinions about animals? The All-Creatures-Great-and-Small assumption of Aquinas turns out to be sentimental (evoking more emotion than what is called for). What about any microbe or parasite that compromises human chances to participate divine goodness? The great monk also wasted brainpower on angels—their nature, activities, and moral state ([Aquinasonline](#), accessed Sept. 25, 2021). Unlike Randall, he'd never met one.

So the *What* depends on the *Who*. Our expensive coffee table, fashioned from a local tree, was thus appraised by our grandson: "That's just a piece o' wood!"



Piece 'o wood.

A clerk once asserted that English is not a true language because it admits words from others (a doctrine as porous as the screen door the author bought). In an advertising circular for Rural King (Dec. 8, 2021), a beaming lad seems to guide a John Deere Ride-On Tractor & Trailer toward the horizontal barrel of the Heritage Sheriff Rough Rider .22LR Revolver. No incongruity for some. (This gun cannot be sold in Illinois, a reminder that law itself is a judgment.) One act of congress defined rare diseases, helpfully but arbitrarily, as those affecting fewer than 200,000 people ([rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/pages/31/faqs-](http://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/pages/31/faqs-about-rare-diseases)

[about-rare-diseases](http://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/pages/31/faqs-about-rare-diseases), accessed Oct. 2021).

Once after a civic parade, a passerby on the sidewalk muttered "Baby murderers" loud enough for a group of Democrats to hear. But the charge doesn't fit the author who, at his father's once held down a few newborn rabbits in a bucket of water until the frantic wriggling stopped. How could anyone extinguish a baby that way? And the soggy diapers!

Any dubious purpose can be rationalized by an objective category. So when Winnie-the-Pooh gets stuck in the door of Rabbit's burrow, the impatient owner makes this self-serving distinction: "Nobody was more glad to see Pooh than *he* was, still there it was, some lived in trees and some lived underground...." (2)

Halloween has engendered its own spookticism:



Cousins Alice and Sam-the-Transformer.
Charlotte, NC., 2021.

Nine-year-old Alice: "I am so excited! Tomorrow we get to have a party and dress up as our mythology characters and paint pumpkins."

Eleven-year-old Julien (indignant): "That is not fair! Our teachers say we can't celebrate Halloween, because some people don't believe in it. What is there to believe in? How do you not believe in Halloween?"

Alice: "Yeah. People don't believe in walking around the neighborhood? People don't believe in dressing up? People don't believe in candy?"

The word "Christian" itself turns crosses into swords. Over the years, American churchgoers have been warned to repent for knocking back some Jack, setting phonograph needle-to-groove on a Sunday, lusting after a skirt or a Studebaker. But probably not for turning a blind eye to cruelty. Andrew Stanley, the "churches" (b. 1903) reported that white people "would raise a little ol' yearling and sell that t'em for fifteen dollars,

and they had no way to work to pay for 'im direct. They'd take that land for one little yearling."

(3)

Arbitrary but not contentious? The author's friends chose to include certain women in a two-volume text on Latin American history. "Selections that we wrote on in the '70s [explained Jim] were purely subjective. They seemed to be the most significant ten figures we could come up with at the time."

Colonial: Anacaona, Malinche, Inés de Suárez, Saint Rose of Lima, The Nun Ensign, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Xica da Silva, Micaela Bastidas, La Pola, Manuela Sáenz.

Modern: Leopoldina da Braganza, Mariana Grajales, Eliza Lynch, Clorinda Matto de Turner, Gabriela Mistral, Frida Kahlo, Eva Perón, Celia Cruz, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Dilma Rousseff. (4)

Virginia offered 250 specialized license plates, a popular one bearing the image of coiled snake with chops warning “Don’t Tread on Me.” But can a human value a primitive species of chordates as a model of behavior? Satan did, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, when he chose the ideal animal for approaching Eve: “The serpent subtlest beast of all the field” (Book IX, l. 86). A *Don’t Tread-er* values self over civic.



Moving from political to esthetic: can Famous be Less than Artistic? Rockwell Kent knocks *Boy with a Rabbit* for its mushiness. (Plate 61, by Raeburn, 1756-1823)

Let us not be led so far astray by our conditioned penchant for the sentimental as an avenue of escape from the actualities of life as to abandon common sense when confronted by art.

Extreme actualities form an installation in one museum. A room containing a refrigerator and eight wall-shelves holds 200 bottles of beer, all illuminated by a single, hanging lightbulb. Title: “Free Beer (The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art.),” by Tom Marion. Is the staging itself art? (5) And the lyrics of this folk song? Does its extended simile reach the status of Art?

Life is like a mountain railway,
With an engineer that’s brave;
We must make the run successful,
From the cradle to the grave;

Watch the curves, the fills, the tunnels;
Never falter, never fail;
Keep your hands upon the throttle,
And your eyes upon the rail.

Oh, blessed Savior, thou wilt guide us
Til we reach that blissful shore
Where the angels wait to join us
In God's grace forever more.

(library.timelesstruths.org/music/Lifes_Railway_to_Heaven)

Can anybody recognize the guiding words of the Savior? As if they were electronically recorded in an interview — after procuring a signed legal OK as to its conduct and disposition—then typed by Ms. Ann Ipock or Ms. Ann Glesenkamp at the earphones, printed out, corrected by the historian, returned to the interviewee for another overview, picked up, returned to the transcriber a corrected printed out—one final copy returned to the interviewee as a gift and for legal approval, a second deposited somewhere for the public.

Closest way 2,000 years later is a committee. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, introduces The Jesus Seminar. Its Fellows translated Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John, plus the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered in 1945. “They studied, debated, and voted upon each of the more than 1500 sayings of Jesus in the inventory,” then classified these into four color-coded rankings. *Red*, probably Jesus. *Pink*, could be Jesus. *Gray*, not his words but his values. *Black*, a mistake. So for each saying, more than seventy-four opinions were melted into one of four Crayolas. (6) “Don’t Tread on Me” drew ebony.

Question 2. Whether categories overlap or combine.



Reflectshadow

Musical sounds are often spoken of as “colors.” Can shadows also blend with reflections? The former are negatives and the latter copies, yet both enrich the everyday world even while they seem to reveal a hidden one. Can shadows have colors? No surprise that colors themselves blend. Yet I once stared as the flashing red light of an ambulance, strangely parked next door, muddied its complementary color, the green canopy (The neighbor’s gun had discharged its responsibility and my father was scrubbing incongruesome from a wall.)

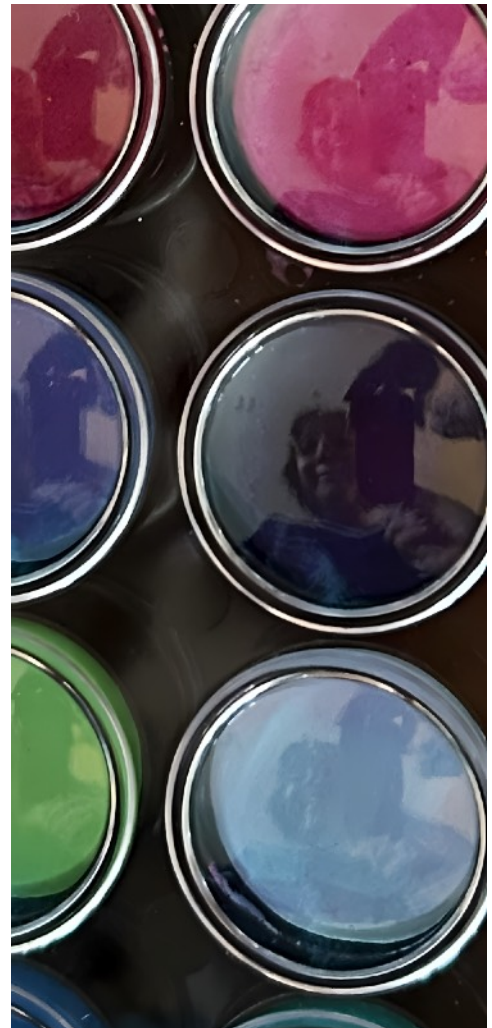
Perception will overlap not only with memory or preconception but with imagination. When the

author visited Amsterdam and its Van Gogh Museum, the pleasant din of automobiles, trams, cars, and bicycles seemed to mask the silence of kidnaped Jewry.

Van Gogh Exhibition: The Immersive Experience somehow animates projected paintings so that clouds glide across landscapes, doors shut, flowers grow, and one figure dissolves into another, so Baby Marcelle grows up to be Postman. The show also fuses the visual with the auditory, i.e., recordings of classical music. Powerful combinations? Or distractions from the authentic? Or both?

Handedness? More overlap. Although the determining factor is “preference,” Randall, like many other people, is both left-and right-handed. Not ambidextrous but lobster-like—fine motor skills to the left, gross motor to the right. But if a task requires a crooked arm, it’s the left—stirring food, ironing clothes, hoisting a Margarita, or holding a baby.

The *Nova Scotia* carried both cargo and passengers, while the *Queen Mary 2* serves as both a cruise ship and a transoceanic liner. A frenemy is a likable adversary, a burkini a wetsuit for Muslimodesty. When the author



Can you see Sam’s liquid face in this liquid palette?

jokingly complimented a grocery store employee on a “display”—a container of blueberries left by a customer atop a stack of pizzas—she replied, “Cross-marketing.” In the United States, the Christmas celebration has fused religious with seasonal, so the Drummer Boy’s *pa rum pum pum* joins Frosty’s *thumpety thump thump*. With the third fusion, commercialism, the Advent calendar begins when the costumed Wise Men rap on the stable door: “Trick or Treat!”

In a now-defunct overlap, the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice once combined theology with cardiac surgery. Such fatal coupling might be by intention, as with Allah-American Airlines, founded and folded on September 11, 2001.

A metaphor works by superimposing two foreign categories upon each other, like a double exposure. For example, the author’s phrase “Dog as ambassador-without-portfolio.” Freddy the Pig illustrates anthropomorphism—giving human shape to a member of a different species. This figure of speech overlaps with metaphor—as with King Penguin in the photo. Such drawings fill the pages of *The Animal Declaration*, its satiric story and masterful engravings unattributed. Although this beaked ruler seems an outlandish incongruity, Christians have no problem imagining Jesus as a Lamb King.

Vintage radio shows had musical themes and, surprisingly for lowbrow programs, these eighty-plus pieces included about twenty classical ones. So an orchestral dogsled is directed by Sergeant Preston of the Yukon: “On, you huskies!,” King. The theme’s initial triplets—serenely-determined and stately-rollicking—merge into a rhapsody. The whole stirring piece overlaps incongruously with its own source: the overture to a comic opera, *Donna Diana*, by Emil von Reznicek, 1894 (old-time.com/themes.html, accessed Nov. 2021).

Boy with a Rabbit might still be valued, although Sentimental. (One definition of this adjective is asking for more emotion than is deserved.) For sure, literary genres can overlap. A tragicomedy such as *A Winter’s Tale* evokes both laughter and tears. A *pathedy* such as *Death of a Salesman* evokes pathos but has no imposing magnitude of characters, language, thought, situations, or cosmic implication. An sketch with Bob Newhart on *Mad TV* entitled “STOP IT!” may be *comicruel* (youtube.com/watch?v=aAhA7KfbJgg). Should *Winnie the Pooh*, because its subtle humor partly goes over the heads of children, be shelved under *Kiddult*? Does a blood-drawing blackberry plant combine vegetable and animal? Should every freethinker acknowledge the straddlegory?

What was a Studillac? Or a Chrysler Sedambulance? A Randambulance once rescued a future author. What makes a four-wheeled vehicle a “crossover”? A trolley a train? For example, the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin electric line (unplugged one day in 1959) ran as if on one rail *city*, the other *rural*. It made a stop at the author’s hometown between Chicago and two westerly towns on the Fox River. *Along the Waccamaw* called it “a trolley on a country holiday (p. 37), while *Trolley Cars* more precisely defined it as an “interurban.” (7) A diesel locomotive actually employs a diesel-electric powertrain, a form of continuously-variable transmission.

Was Shakespeare’s *Othello*—that eloquent, commanding soldier—also a figure of comic credulity? Christianity itself relies on Holy Overlap, not only with the regal lamb but with the virgin mother, not to mention her son, mortal yet divine. A billboard along I-77 in North Carolina, illustrates several combinations. (1) Although crucified, **JESUS IS ALIVE!** (2) This

headline seems both witness and warning. (3) “Hey, I still love you” is irreverent pal talk for a savior. (4) The roadside communication blends evangelical fervor with execrable taste.

Question 3. Whether a member of one category can shift to another.

“Once for bracelets, now for bullets!” Near the start of World War II, so declared an advertisement by Eagle-Picher, a company that mined lead and zinc. (*Time Magazine*, Feb. 2, 1942, the month R. Wells was born.) Junk yards became steel mills, young men soldiers, the future shouldered off the sidewalk by the present.

During World War II, one girl was sent on a train from London to the comparative safety of provincial Devonshire. There, however, she became a mistreated servant, and four years later, she had to re-adjust to being a daughter. (Nora Mitchell, author’s interview in Floyd, VA, 2013). Baby Rapunzel was essentially stolen by way of an unethical contract (like Andrew Stanley’s reported house-for-a-yearling). She changed roles from biological child to “stepchild” to wife to mother.

Phenomena can shift categories with a person’s experience. It’s easy to declare that “Peanut butter, sauce of fish / Never meet in any dish”—until you taste Thai coconut-shrimp-curry. Or something might even form a new category before your eyes. As you leaf through the *Hammacher Schlemmer Catalog (Holiday Preview 2021)* you might group its 300+ items into (1) *Don’t want that*, (2) *Inviting but I’ll pass*, and (3) *Who would buy that?* But wait! The Mimicking Slow Talking Sloth has just created (4) *Gotta Have It!* To Randall the paper jacket of *World-Famous Paintings* seemed frame-worthy, with its time-curved edges that suggested the venerable garment pictured, but it sank from wall to a wastepaper.

Oriental Bittersweet escaped a flowerpot, traversed an ocean, and augmented the category Invasive. A two-story elementary school in Virginia repurposed classrooms to a store that sold fabrics & crafts and echoed long-silent footsteps. Arthur Brooke’s narrative poem *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) became a play and eventually a ballet and movie. A folk tale became an illustrated book, *Rapunzel*, and then an animated film. Sergeant Preston’s Husky pulled his sled from radio to television. A verse by James Whitcomb Riley (1885) became a comic strip in 1924, then a concurrent radio show, then a movie, then a musical play, then the film *Annie* (1977). A poem became a national anthem (below). A painting composed of dots became a stage musical composed of notes: *Sunday in the Park with George* (Sondheim and Lapine, 1984). A driver who once transported King Tut in a tractor-trailer later hauled Randall in an Uber.

In 1913 a bridge over the Guyandotte River in West Virginia had been weakened from constant high water. Although the fireman and brakeman chose to walk across it, and the engineer was warned by several observers that the locomotive was too heavy, on it chuffed. The structure collapsed in the middle under nearly half a million pounds of engine and crashed into the water to become a sunken-iron Ozymandias. The foolish engineer himself was reclassified by a songster as tragically clueless:

Ed sat in his cab window so peaceful and so fair
He did not know that on the bridge that death awaited him there.
(Lyle, *Scalded*, pp. 83-91)

Even death can be denatured. Within the author's lifetime, more and more expired people have "passed away" or simply "passed," as if on the sidewalk: "Howdy." Even animal companions have been accorded this euphemism.

Americans and Canadians forced Indian children from tribal lands into schools to remake them as English-speaking Christians. German Jews were demoted from citizens to stateless, and the cultured grocer Ernest Lion became a *Maus*. (8) Formerly autonomous Africans were chained to a ship and then to the Mudsill Class (James Hammond), while their owners battled to preserve their status as liegemen to King Cotton. Of course many humans have tried to slip, climb, or claw from one category to another. Indigenous people have often presented themselves as European Spanish. How many with Negroid features have tried to pass as Caucasian?

People often try to keep others, even dead ones, in a category: Robert E. Lee must not dismount from his horse of heroism, and Frédéric Chopin, despite evidence, must celebrate only one kind of pride, Polish. One grouping can also affect another: Mr. Arthur G. Halloran celebrated the influence of poets on music, and Hanukkah is looking a lot like Christmas.

Familiar words might conceal verbal complexity. O: an interjection. Say: imperative verb form. *Can you see?* interrogative clause. And skeletal grammar can support a raiment-clad body. The following words—*what...* and *...glare, bomb... gave... O... say... does banner wave?*—generate about ninety. (Lyrics of poem: "Defence of Fort M'henry," by Francis Scott Key, 1814.) And the words of this first verse, set to music, comprise nineteen semitones (half-tones)—hard to sing!

In a related shift, the magisterial "*Star Spangled Banner*" borrowed its tune from a pop song. Another example of words-to-lyrics: Schiller's poem "An die Freude" contributed part of the choral text to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* (1824).



Video: David E. Lee Performs the U.S. National Anthem | Charlotte Knights 2025

Creator: David E. Lee, June 2025.

Direct Link: youtube.com/shorts/8TqKNgbIGis

Question 4. Whether a classification help form a continuum.

Human nipples range in color from pink-grapefruit to prune. People themselves can have male and female characteristics without being fruits. As to ethnic or so-called racial makeup: Andrew Stanley (the “churcher”) had a white grandfather whom he remembered with affection; so was this Andrew a Caucasian-African-American? What about the much contested “baby”: at what stage from conception to birth could its image adorn a box of diapers?

Plenititles. How important are names to creative works? This quick outline touches mainly on graphic art, but it also applies to music. In each, the brain’s verbal powers somehow collaborate, even blend, with nonverbal ones. “How” I asked a neurologist. “No one knows.”

1. *No label needed, or perhaps verifying the obvious*: “Art Work on Freight Car.” And “Starry Night” without its title, would picture a starry night. But one dramatic piece of music, given a title, becomes a paean to a river: *The Moldau*, two words now dissolved in picturesque water. (*Vltava*, by Smetana, 1875).*



"Art Work on Freight Car"—also no signature. Courtesy Timken Gallery.



Smears like brush strokes on canvas call attention to the window itself.

2. Helpful identification. Of the form, scene, persona, artist situation, story. For example, *Sonata in F for Two Violins and Basso Continuo* (J.S. Bach). *Pike's Peak from the Garden of the Gods*, a photograph by William Henry Jackson. (9) "Costa Rica 2022:." When I sent a photo to Paul Zelinsky, he noted that it couldn't distinguish between sunrise and sunset. Randall's School of Art jokingly gave Mr. Zelinsky the following assignment: "Within an hour, make one sketch that indicates sunrise, by whatever scenic particulars, and the other, sunset. No clocks." I myself half-heartedly imagined a solution—a diptych of peasants with their carts and oxen—but how could it distinguish TO or FROM the hectares? An amazing submission arrived:



A gift from Paul O. Zelinsky. By permission.

3. *Essential i.d.* “Hope,” by George Frederick Watts, 1817-1904) designates the portrait as allegorical (*World-Famous*, Plate 74). Programmatic music states a subject to be explored—e.g., the tone poem *Don Juan*, by Richard Strauss. “Tortues,” in *La Carnaval des animaux*, by Saint-Saëns, predicts slow-going measures.



For the photo to the left, which title would you choose (alphabetical)?

1. “Gladiola purée.” 2. “Unpacking from Move-In.”
3. What is wrong in this picture?” 4. All of the above.

A title can also avoid misinterpretation, as when “The Blind Girl” indicates that the figure is not merely sleeping or contemplating. (John Everett Millais, 1829-1896, *World-Famous*, Plate 77.) Should the title “Christina’s World,” by Andrew Wyeth, identify the girl as crippled? Should the scene of Charlotte (above) be titled “View from Novant Presbyterian Medical Center”? The subject of the photo would then shift from engaging scene to negative situation.

4. *Interpretation* (can overlap with “Identification”). For the spray-painted freight-car, this alternate title: *Trained Artist*. Or how about *Vandalart*? The title of one of the Famous Paintings is *The Last of England*, by Ford Madox Brown, 1821-93 (Plate 74). It not only reveals the people as

emigrants but implies their state of mind. Beethoven’s otherwise-neutrally-titled String Quartet, Op. 132 (1825) diverges in the third movement to “Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode.” A title-of-intention can have a curious relation to the work, as with one striking portrait called “Beauty within karmic fish.”

A nudging title can be problematic, as with Maurice Ravel’s work for solo piano (later orchestrated by Gabriel Fauré). A simple “Pavane” would have specified dance music; “Pavane for a Princess,” names a royal dedicatee; but “Pavane for a Dead Princess” a crowned corpse. So to expectant ears, the piece becomes sentimental, for the listener enjoys feeling mournful without paying—unlike poor Margarita, who no longer senses the weight of a tiara. (Ravel suggests that as a royal, she deserves more wet hankies than a commoner.)

Traditionally, visual art is distinguished from illustration, for it can stand by itself. But how often does Art not depend on Word? Seems that a graphic image with a title may be cousin a one that adjoins advertising “copy.”

Title-guides can be so prolix that they compete with the work for attention. An extreme example: “That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door),” by Ivan Albright, 1897-1983. The title does imply a narrative to explain the black-ribboned mourning-bouquet attached to a guilt-distorted door. According to the Art Institute of Chicago, the painting is “an evocative meditation on the choices and regrets of life” (artic.edu, accessed Sept. 2021). Certainly a more inviting door opens to the beer-stocked refrigerator. Your author’s title for the miniature-cow photograph in Scripture 3: “Life’s Balance Beam is that Which I Must Negotiate between Pleasure and Duty (Top & Bottom Panes), as well as between Mishmashed Demands (between Transparent Exterior and Double-Glazed-Reflected Interior).”



From Francis Quarles, *Emblems and Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man, Modernized*, 1773.
(*Wikimedia*, accessed Oct. 2021.)

Any graphic work with long-titled interpretation overlaps with a literary form called the emblem, a combination of image and epigram.

Question 5. Whether a classification can be lopsided.

A census-worker surely recorded a household of one full-size female and seven little males. Another imbalance: royalty vs. commoners, a proportion that serves the illusion of “special” because the former are so rare. Television comedies usually have a laugh track, so the early *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* show was an exception, as when the antics of Burr Tillstrom’s puppets made Fran Allison look around clueless and speechless, with only a hint of the crew laughing.

Many North American pop and folk singers effect a vaguely White-Southern-American accent—pronouncing the word *my* as *ma*, and *I* as *ah*. Would it kill you to break a diphthong? Bob Dylan didn’t even grow up in southern Minnesota.

In electronic compilations, “songs” rule, as if nobody ever composed an orchestral piece. Although pop lyrics are lopsidedly sexual-romantic, folk lyrics (like most poems) are blessed with a greater variety of subjects. In the multitude of songs about train wrecks, only one that Katie Letcher Lyle came across uses a minor key: “The Death of Jerry Damron” (*Scalded*, p. 113). If the differentiating principle changes from *key* to *race*, “The

Hamlet Wreck,” declares Lyle, “is the only ‘black’ wreck song we have” (*Scalded*, p. 82).

Moving from vocal to postal, a stamp picturing an upside-down airplane landed on riches.

Moving now from postal to astronomical: on July 21, 1969, the moon and the earth became the only two celestial bodies to receive human footprints.

Question 6. Whether a classification can be illogical.

Plenitude needeth not plausibility. Even the sacrosanct Sugar High exists only in the minds of moms because insulin regulates the metabolism of carbohydrates. The Gay Agenda is an imagined To-Do list. Can political parties logically include HardAss Hindus? Can the order of “Souls” really have wings, like the figure in Whitney’s emblem to the left, or like the crane on a Turkish postage stamp (identified by R. Daves). Or like bats, those flying guanomalies of Scripture 28?

The engineer George Alley, who pulled the brake to the last, was certainly “a brave young martyr,” according to one song (Lyle, *Scalded*, p. 42); but can such a designation embrace a reassembled suicide bomber? “Sacred tribal land” is an unconvincing notion to the secular, but credible if rephrased as “Tribal Land” or “Land sacred to tribes.” Numerology, which assumes that a class of numbers, or combinations of numbers or letters, has mystical implications, seems equally ancient and nonsensical. Inquiring minds want to know why a task is feminine—“Git ‘er done”—like a ship or locomotive—but every driver is a *he* (“He’s turning”).

More than one cockamamie notion deserves erasure. Royalty is unreality—even if assumed true in Abrahamic religions. For example in the Gospel of Matthew, forty-two verses insist upon Jesus as a blue-blood even though he was a blue-collar. (“Isn’t true royalty,” asked my friend Jim Blackburn, “good-looking people?”) As for the concept of Doomsday, surely the end is near, and astrology is space debris. In the Chinese Zodiac The Year of the Dog should be put down. “Der ewige Jude” of Nazi propaganda is objectionable if only for its triteness. “Fatherland” and “Motherland” should be repurposed as vacation spots like the Ark Park.

The notion of human “races” is anti-scientific and a means to elevate one group over another—e.g., Japanese vs. Korean, light-colored over dark, less dark over mores. The principle of *Casta*? This word for *lineage* in Spanish and Portuguese was “used as a racial and social identifier.”

It’s a good idea to check the refrigerator not only for bottled beer but expired ideas. At the unseen back, a once-fresh item might grow cotton, an expiration date might use Roman numerals, and a fillet of fish might have reverted to the angulate ancestor of the whale and hippo.

NOTES

* You might reverse-engineer title and music. Imagine hearing a certain vigorous piece for the first time and supplying a title: how likely would it be “Jupiter”? Ditto after hearing a serene, impressionist work, even after this prompt: “Afternoon of a—” After hearing a certain piano quintet, how likely would you guess the right fish? (“Trout.”) It’s easier to guess for a *song* because of its lyrics: e.g., “Walking the Dog” (George Gershwin, 1937).

1. *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. Radford, VA: Wilder, 2007. For this gift the author thanks Ralph Roe, canine-acoustic historian (Scripture 13).

2. A. A. Milne, *The Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, with decorations by Ernest H. Shepard. New York: Dutton Children’s Books/Penguin, 2016, pp. 27-28.

3. R. Wells, *Old Times in Horry County: A Narrative History*. Introduction by Dr. Charles Joyner. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007, p. 132. Eleven portrait-sketches by Bob Graham include the cover drawing of Mr. Andrew Stanley posing on his earlier tractor.

4. James D. and Linda Henderson (Ph.D.s) and Suzanne Litrel. *Ten Notable Women of Early Latin America*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022. Jim by email, 2021:

5. *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 360°: Views on the Collection*. Ed. Judy Bloch and Suzanne Stein, 2016, p. 103.

6. New Translation and Commentary by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar. New York: Polebridge Press/Macmillan, 1993, pp. ix, 12, 36.

7. Frank Sullivan and Fred Winkowski. *Trolley Cars: Streetcars, Trams and Trolleys of North America: A Photographic History*. Osceola, WI: Motor Books International, 1995, pp. 69-70.

8. *Maus. A Survivor’s Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. Art Spiegelman, author and illustrator,



serialized 1980-91. The book: New York, Pantheon, 1991

9. *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 360°*, pp. 166-67.

Scripture 15

Geodyssey IV: "Randy, Can You Believe This?!"

In late November, the road from Turkey to Iran begins to wind up & around snowy mountain tops and to skirt cliffs.

I take a pained look at our bus driver with his stubbled beard and few teeth; but his shirt is tucked in and his driving admirable. After parking overnight at the border, the vehicle succumbs to inertia, resisting hands, arms, shoulders, torso, and legs as several of us guys lean against it. Our boots churn a little faster, the weight diminishes, the tailpipe coughs, and the bus chugs downhill by itself. Its coating of Turkish snow-desert—as high as the clouds it merges with—is now dusted Iranian.



The Club Car.

Soon the passengers formed a crowd at the door, boarded, and bounced their seats away from the customs building. There, Tom and I had unrolled our sleeping bags near a paint-brushed line that separated a large room into two countries. Adventure continued with a daylong ride accompanied by exotic pop songs piped in over tinny speakers. “I admired this woman’s fancy purse,” said Tom, “till it moved its wing.” Once the bus skidded to a halt as a camel loped across the road while bucking its driver and kicking up dust with ornery, rangy legs.

That night in Tabriz we were hustled from our hotel into a cab or car by two unidentified men whose words were equally loud, gruff, and unintelligible. At what turned out to be a police station, we registered as itinerants. The next day we made the acquaintance of a friendly young man who gave us a tour that included a carpet factory where children, prized for their dexterous fingers, tied tot-knots as they looked up at us shyly. He also introduced us to a missionary couple who, in a rare coincidence, had met at my college, and who offered a room. We spent two high-spirited days with Rev. Glenn C. and Mrs. Knecht as well as their children—even taking in some classical music. Learning that they associated beards with riffraff-drifters, I had mine shaved off for the equivalent of eight cents.

In Teheran, we visited Rev. and Mrs. Robert Y. Bucher, missionary parents of my schoolmates; after an evening of laughter, caution turned to an invitation to stay for a week. Invited to a supper held by a school, we basked in the presence of several young female teachers, who brought out our signature high spirits—entertaining and even comedic. But the streets with their traffic-racket held underemployed, drably-clothed men. The brassiere in a window-display pointed toward rustling burkas on the sidewalk, garb that turned women to wraiths. Obviously, citizens venerated the Shah because they set his photograph in many a store window. A few times as Tom and I walked, I enjoyed vexing him by trying to hold his hand, as was the custom among young men.

Two invisible rails now ran through five hundred miles of darkness to the northeastern city of Mashhad, a holy place we were told. As the train pulled night toward day, I developed a sharp headache that caused me to wander up and down the corridor pressing my temples, back and forth, a pain that eased no more than the friction of whirling steel disks, the whipping of outside air, the straining of carriages.

The travelers’ grapevine warned us not to shove eastward through bandit-ridden territory, so intending to make a long U beneath Afghanistan to Pakistan, we purchased a bus ticket to Zahedan in southeastern corner of Iran.

After a brief night in a hotel, we mustered at the prescribed 5 a.m. and sat leaning against a wall until the actual departure at 7. I took a seat on the left side of the bus, halfway back, and bounced hour after hour along the gravel. Once Tom and I, along with a fellow from New Zealand, sang “Old MacDonald” and drew laughter with its snorted *oink-oink*. But by then I had come down with aching muscle and bone. Because the seat-backs extended only to the neck, I tried and tried to lean against the glass seismograph; it registered each vibration, tilt, and bump, although my head was wrapped in a new Turkish scarf made of bright yellow wool. Compulsively I would tear off a piece of chapatti—a disk of flatbread made of wheat—and from a tube squeeze on to it Nestle’s sweetened condensed milk.



Portrait of engineer by T. Hollinger.

At one roadside place a man steadied me as I almost fell into a samovar. But at a smoky, low-ceilinged place furnished with benches and metal tables, I ate what seemed the tastiest food on earth, *chelo kebab*, a skewer of sausage-like pieces of lamb that crowned a heap of steaming rice. Then the bus broke down. For ten hours we sat while someone tried to get a new bearing to replace the burned-out one. Hardly able to walk, I nevertheless climbed a rocky hill for a magnificent view of the December desert; on the way down, I hobbled a little too fast, then faster, then plummeted onto my hands and yellow-flashing skull, injured by the very earth I had surveyed.

More tear-offs of sweet-squeezed chapattis. Tom and I now collaborate on a dream of Ceylon: can we not make our way down to that island, loll on the warm beach, sip from a punctured coconut, dally with maidens who wear fronds broken off from the same tree? Then why not put our money together for an old boat—much more rudimentary than the vessel that young Tom, his brother and their friend once navigated down the Illinois River

—even a fancy raft with a sail. We would cross the Indian Ocean to the Malay Peninsula, and then by land to Singapore. There, as planned, we would split up into north and south. Yes, our dear, warm flotsam of a vessel, our browning faces shaded by wide-brimmed hats and caressed by the spice-perfumed breeze....

The outdoor toilet was a knee-high, mud-walled compound dabbled with squat-piles.

Our reconstituted coach pulled into Zahedan after fifty-one hours—an average of twelve miles an hour. I had a cold and a toothache yet was unable to fall asleep for the third day. Walked about the town and our rented, barracks-room like a zombie. Tom and I, too impatient to hang around for five days for the weekly passenger train eastward, decided to take what was described as the daily water-train to the border of Pakistan and then try hitchhiking.

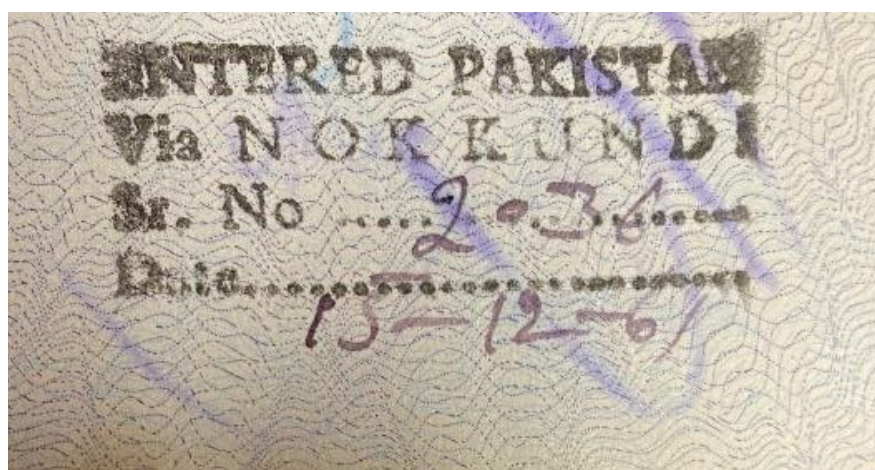
Our gloves serving as tickets, we grasped the ladder of a flat tank-car and climbed to its railed top, hauling our gear by strap and string. Our fellow passengers included the fellow from New Zealand, a boy of about twelve years old who smiled above a boxing pose, and a bearded elder who sat on the contents of a gunny sack next to his sheep. Everyone got along well. Tom and I felt relief at moving again even though it would extend only thirty miles into the desert.

At the end of the jaunt in Nokkundi, a woman with hand resembling leather gloves tightened a blanket-like garment across her mouth and nose against the sandy dust, an element that further blurred the distinction between the small buildings and the terrain from which they'd been molded. Her children scooped up a few pieces of coal from beside the locomotive wheels.

This was a border-post town, so after taking a photo I found myself wrestling the camera away from a soldier who shouted either “Neex” or “Feeneesh,” or both, all-purpose international commands.



Boiler hauls water to Dessicistan.



Earlier, up the mountains to Iran; now across the desert to “Pah-kistahn,”
December 15, 1961.

If we wanted to dry our thumbs, there was not even a breeze from a passing vehicle. So we hoisted our gear and walked down the road to a bend near a primitive rest stop, I in a trance. At least my feet didn’t cry for help because they now trod on arch supports fashioned in Germany after a struggle with cobblestones. Closer and closer we moved toward a fort shaped from the gray-white-beige stone and the bare mountains surrounding it. I now equated moving with surviving. I lay down on the cold, white gravel with green, padded coat as a buffer and knapsack as a pillow. Thoughts were inseparable from aching head and arms, sickness, and fatigue.



DKW sedan (?) said to be used by German officers in WWII.

After a while I got to my feet and tottered up a rise to a privy. There I suspended my new journal, a handsome Ledger with stiff, blue covers, and dropped it into the Sewer of Despond.

Some time later, on the horizon back toward Nokkundi—was that a cloud of dust? In front of it a speck slowly resolved into a vehicle—a large sedan, black above the dusty bottom-half, which had apparently driven off the celluloid from an old movie. Its oversize tires came to a halt. Tom asked the occupants—protectively dressed, seasoned travelers—if they would carry me to an oasis called Dalbandin a few hours ahead. They somehow mined a place for me in the right side of the back seat by fastening one more bundle to a rack on the trunk or roof. Tom reached in through the open window, stuffed the bulging canvas sack onto my lap, vowed to meet me there, and shut the door. *Swing low, sweet chariot.*

That evening I continued to rest, delighted to see trees again with their leaves, bark, and living cells. My rolling benefactors and I shared a table at a very simple restaurant where, immediately after I ordered chicken curry, a squawk sounded, equally loud and brief. Apprehensive about the speculative rendezvous with Tom, I stumbled back to a rented hovel, halting to marvel at the stars as numerous as the grains of sand beneath them. They reminded me of the time my father, driving all night in 1954, stopped at the Arizona-California border for an agricultural inspection. We three boys awoke, climbed out of the Plymouth station wagon, and slowly spun dumbfounded at our first view of the firmament.

Now I am wrapping myself in the bedroll when I sense a commotion near the hanging-flap-of-a-door. A growl vibrates through my body as I remember seeing a few strays that hung around the place. Vulnerable and fragile, I grab my flashlight and behold two pairs of gleaming marbles. Galvanized by fright, I yell & clap away the scavengers.

Sometime during the night I heard Tom reappear. He had hitched a ride with a turbaned Indian, who was forced by soldiers to remove all items from his VW bus and then replace them. The next morning I felt restored after a benevolent doctor, who seemed to enjoy conversation, gave me some powdered medicine. Good luck continued when Tom and I were both accorded a jammed ride in the desert-car from Dalbandin to the railroad station in Quetta. The journey was measured by actual sticking-up milestones along the rugged highway.

“*CHAH-eee...*” “*CHAH-eee,*” the Pakistani vendors would drone as the train stopped at each platform. Through the space of a lifted window, a hand would serve clay cups of tea mixed with sugar and water-buffalo milk. I remembered a time during that stint with Wall-Fill: from the rear of the box truck I handed out a dime to children selling Kool Aid—several times, between loading a noisy hopper with spun-glass insulation pumped to an attic.

Now Tom and I were enjoying a semi-modern railroad car. To my gratification, it bore an insignia that gave credit to the United States for funding. I seemed restored, and we spent the day placidly gazing out the windows or lounging on the steps as green crops passed with a clatter. The noise made conversation difficult but we often talked inside, maybe with a native who knew some English.

Once I ensconced myself on the metal steps, in a dreamy mood induced by the leftward flow of adjoining rails and fields. A sudden thought: what if a train should pass from the opposite direction? Out of curiosity I gingerly leaned forward and peered to the right—at a black

rotundity a few carriages up that yawed like the Phantom Boat of Doom. Before I could even gauge its speed, I jerked back, kept my eyes hard open, and clenched the handrail: *Just hold on.* The blast sucked my eardrums and churned the air for a violent second as a blurred line of cars clattered past. Suddenly I breathed again and green crops reappeared, strangely composed.

“Randy, can you believe this?” The sun had awakened us to cold air outside our bedrolls, which we had spread on wooden racks. Lifting my head from the pillow made of a shirt stuffed with clothing, I found my companion leaning on his elbow and pointing to the floor at a tidy orange blaze. Several passengers hunkered down and rubbed their hands near its smoking scraps. In the row of seats next to the window other travelers had spent the night sitting up. One man possessed only a shawl to buffer the cold, and I uneasily watched his fits of shivering. As he sniffed loudly and wiped his nose on his sleeve, I kept wanting to get down and lend him my coat, but since I dared not risk catching a worse cold, I kept my raiment and discomfiture.

My knapsack was now heavier by the weight of an oversized tubular key, an accidental souvenir of the hotel in Tabriz. My pocket contained half a back-corner molar that had broken off when I bit into a seedy confection on the platform at Quetta. Now some food or drink was beginning to cause me an internal problem. Tom thoughtfully reminded me that I was carrying a bottle of paregoric, from which I now sipped like a wino.



Able to unlock only memory.

In Lahore, naughty of name, we trod the crowded streets, ducking around a scribe here (sitting cross-legged on the sidewalk), a smoking scooter there. I could look down and see Tom’s boots somehow shuttling six inches farther out than my own, as always. But I was in no shape to recall that happy moment in Salonica when, as I walked from the Yugoslavian train toward the agreed-upon hostel, I heard persistent footsteps, turned around and beheld that same grin!



Mrs. Aurel Foster.

We spent the night on woven-rope cots supplemented by escape-holes. Then onto another train we climbed and headed ninety miles north to Sialkot. There after a few hours a dark-skinned man arrived, wearing a sort of wound-on scarf-turban, showed us to a two-wheeled cart with a fabric top, wrapped himself in a blanket, and grabbed the reins. He had been sent by my classmate’s parents, Dr. Robert and Mrs. Aurel Foster, who operated the Christian Training Institute.

The two of us face backward as dusk falls and the horse clip-clops toward the city’s outskirts. Bells on harness remind me of hometown wagon-or-sleigh rides. Now and then a car overtakes the pedestrians, cyclists, or other tongas as the air, damp and cool, carries the scent of horses, grass, food, and cooking smoke that mutes the sunset. Overhead, green-leafed branches decorate the road. Ushered into the Fosters’ home,

originally a British courthouse, we observe a high-ceilinged hall, a warming wood-stove, and an alien yet familiar object: a tree with colored lights draping its needles. Offered a glass of milk by my substitute mother, I soon gaze at a tall serving poured right from a bottle in the A & P dairy case. Grasping it, however, I feel warmth. Persevering, I bend a forearm and take my first and last sip of weedy water-buffalo.

Scripture 16

Property I: Selective Slavery

"I don't know who the hell you are, but this is private property."

An unpaved road beckoned me to hike upon it despite the *No Trespassing*. Over the sound of my footsteps I detected pumping pistons and rolling tire-treads. I strode with feigned unconcern in hopes that the vehicle behind me would keep going, but it came to a halt, and down from the open window of a big pickup, a tanned leather face glared through sunglasses. I had no principles to stand on, just this very acreage that was clearly marked at the junction of the county road and the firing range.

I apologized and lamely reported that I had turned around at the second sign above the ranch itself. "This whole thing is private property." No gun barrel, so no risk of Cool Hand Luke's "failure to communicate." Would he call the authorities? Would he notice the dried-up pod yanked from his locust tree and stuck in my pocket? It was a souvenir of Colorado for Sidney, who had picked one like it on our retirement acreage.

Off drove the Truck of Justice. I felt relieved but stripped of dignity and academic degrees. Yes, I had broken the law, but how dangerous could a person be who wears fuzzy, pajama-like pseudo-camouflage pants that had drawn the mirth of Katie the graduate student? The jolly rancher's driveway, moreover, was as wide as a two-lane, and it stretched flat and straight on the near-desert of Boulder County. Why couldn't he have said, "Glad to see you enjoying our road, brother, but can you tell me what's up?"

Mortified, I quickly returned to our daughter's house. What came to mind was the Cyclops tribe in *The Odyssey*, with their symbolic uni-vision. "They have no laws nor assemblies of the people, but live in caves on the tops of high mountains; each is lord and master in his family, and they take no account of their neighbors." And I thought of the protagonist in Leo Tolstoy's story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" (1886), who answered the question by trying to claim as many hectares as he could span in a day's run, only to collapse into a grave.

I also remembered a cyclist in Boulder yelling "Get out of the way!" for letting my car stand in what I immediately recognized as a bike lane. So in one day I had been rebuked first for treating public space like private, then the reverse. A realization: I myself had once become public property in where else but Colorado.



On July 31, 1967, Selective Service number **11 122 42 91** climbed into a Greyhound bus full of young men and rode from Laramie to Denver for a draft physical. This was the first of my travels to be coerced. Even the little house-trailer in Connecticut had served as a kind of trolley, its front and back doors opening to a platform on one side, *Clang! Clang! Clang!* Next stop, Master's Degree!



I did not take it amiss when a doctor's fingers checked my privates. At that time only a few people in the world had made me burn with resentment. One was a stocky haberdasher in Skopje, Yugoslavia, who saw me standing near the mystic amber light of a substantial Grundig radio and listening in rapture to what was probably Bach. Granted, I wore muddy boots because Tom and I had just taken a shortcut through fields to escape from brief captivity after photographing a tank. With a frown, the owner stalked over and poked the *off* button, leaving me amid a jumble of shirts and the disorder of travel. But now at the examination center I came to detest no fewer than four personages.

An optometrist has charged in: "I can't do this with all this noise!" We underwear-clad candidates are sitting in a big room nervously, most wordless, a few jabbering. "Keep it down in here!" As more men file out toward the offices, others dribble in, some laughing and talking. In bursts the lens-jockey: "The next one who makes noise will be the last one in this whole group to be seen!" Then an awkward fellow lopez in and seeks comfort by his own voice. Each of us guards his own butt in silence. "You there!" An index finger aims at the half-naked ambushee: "Sit down!" Through spectacles (irony) the young fellow stares in humiliation. "You wait till the end of the line!"

From my own fingers, another set snatches what I hope is a release from prison. The unidentified person scans an appraisal from my doctor plus my two-page history of a lumbar-disk problem—

caused by hauling someone's overloaded suitcase to the vanishing-point of the Illinois Central platform. "We'll have to have more than this," he grunts. In failing spirits I submit to an examination and an X-ray. Then I sit in the hall waiting to learn whether I will teach or march. Will I go into basic training a couple of years after the poker-playing freshmen across the hall? With the rustic truckers of Connecticut who had lobbed a pumpkin onto me and my date as we walked to my trailer? Like those orange shards, would my graduate degree cling to my trousers? College teachers were not being called up; draft them, draft Wells.

A third functionary hands me an official-looking document. I search for a verdict as if trying to decipher Japanese. "What does it say?" "*Can't you read that?!*" he snarls, his index finger jabbing the slip; "*You pass.*"

In despair I find my way to Personage Four, the recruiter for O.C.S. and Plan B. But he is leaning back, feet on the desk, chatting on the telephone without deigning to look at me as I stand there like a hobo seeking a chicken-leg. That night I carry my free ticket into the northbound coach and take a seat on the left side. This form of transportation had always abetted opportunity and adventure, however challenging. But now I couldn't understand how few raindrops had seeped through to the inside of the window and onto my cheek.

In those days I still admired the late President Kennedy's vow to "bear any burden," still clung to the paradigm of The War (II). But eventually I understood the demeanor of the recruiters as both symptomatic and symbolic—of the arrogance that tinged the whole Southeast Asia debacle, even from its pretext of a beginning **(1)**, and the mendacity that followed it into Laos. I remembered General Maxwell Taylor's speech at the University of Connecticut: when someone asked, "What if the United States just continued to bomb and bomb North Viet Nam until nobody was left?" he replied, "Crime doesn't pay." Countless men have received a draft notice, as in "Die Postkarte," a story by Heinrich Böll. **(2)** And countless have volunteered. Sometimes it has been their parents who received a message. Great-grandmother Sophia Parker Capps must have held the "Regret to inform you"—about my grandfather's late brother—with the same hand that, fragile and age-spotted, reached over the quilt to touch mine thirty years later, in the late 1940s.

In Global Convulsion II, a Sicilian bullet grazed the scalp of William S. Dunning. Had it bitten more deeply I would never have attended his alma mater, Maryville College. But after nearly 2.7 million American soldiers fought in Vietnam—a great many of them out of duty—the communist, anti-colonialist, and cruel government expelled the United States for what it considered trespassing.

After months of appealing the 1-A card, I learned that the Selective Service could find no record of my handwritten request for deferment. As a compromise, I think, the board let me teach for one semester, although drafted with the condition "Postponed." The next semester began with an announcement taped to the window of my front door over its view of the future. Dare I hope for a full reprieve after I turned twenty-six? Indeed, near the end of the academic year I opened the mailbox to find a 2-A card that I had no trouble reading: "Deferred because of civilian occupation." **(3)**

NOTES

1. Alexander Canduci, *The Greatest Lies in History*: New York: Metro Books/Murdoch Books Pty Limited, 2009, pp. 227-37.

2. *So ward Abend und Morgen*, Verlag der Arche, Peter Schifferli, 1955.

3. Tom recalls his experience a year later.

“In 1968 I was called up for active duty and reported to Fort Dix, New Jersey for training. This is in a barren area remote from the chemical plants and refineries filling the so-called ‘Garden State.’ We enjoyed plenty of outdoor entertainment with sunny days hovering close to 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and drenching rains followed by steaming sweat and mosquitos. My unit started out based on the south side of Chicago, but with the advent of the Vietnam War, became the last refuge of well-connected draft dodgers. As such, we probably had the highest concentration of multimillionaires (the professional athletes) and poverty-stricken holders of advanced degrees (us students) of any Army unit. We started out as an infantry battalion but later trained as military police—the 233rd Military Police Battalion.” (By email, 2023.)

Brother Dudley (2025);

We were a group of ten from a Russian language class of sixty-two. Most of us were college dropouts tired of school but still ‘draft bait,’ having lost our student deferments. President Johnson declared war on the North Vietnamese in March 1965. That spring we enlisted as Airmen Basic, U.S. Air Force, and we scored high on the military entrance exam. So we were given a Modern Language Aptitude Test, and if our score was high enough, sixty-two of us were given orders to the USAF Intensive Russian Language School at a small detachment just off campus at Indiana University in Bloomington. It was a thirty-seven-week course with small classes and native Russian instructors who were not allowed to speak English. There was a ton of oral recitation, writing in Russian, and taking dictation, especially in numbers.

“From there we were assigned to a former WWII airfield in West Texas where we received specific training in operating radios, working with the radios and reel-to-reel tape recorders, taking full notes of radio ‘intercepts,’ recognizing a variety of foreign languages, and given info on the Russian military and geography. My group of ten was to be sent to Alaska to fly on RC-135's, so we received additional training in an altitude chamber and a one-month aircrew survival school in the mountains of Washington near Canada. Included was a short course in Russian law in case we were captured. Our recon missions averaged fifteen hours from take-off to landing. We flew at least twice a month and amassed roughly 900 hours of flight time in 60 missions, receiving the U.S. Air Medal for 2 ½ years of flying in ‘unfriendly’ airspace.”

Our younger brother, Gregory Scott Wells, a college graduate, sprang from basic training in Fort Bliss, Texas, to The United States Military Academy at West Point as a psychologist’s assistant.

Scripture 17

The Estate IV: "Stoney Reality"

"The meadow of dream has little to do with stoney reality and its harrows and reapers."

May Days ©, The University of Iowa Press, 1988, p. 3. Used with permission.

So declares Samuel F. Pickering, Jr., in a gift from the author's neighbor, Miss Margie Keith, who owned a former used-book store and wrote her autobiography for *Floydiana*. Although the writer meant to warn metaphorical farmers, he inadvertently challenged Randall—who dreamed of eliminating literal rocks and pebbles from a quarter-acre of the Blue Ridge Plateau.

Thus began a scratching of the world's surface, not in a trivial sense, but an almost ceremonial one. More engaged than wheel-steel-speeding on rails inches above it. The process may recall the Akkadian ritual *Stmt oea* [Penitent Pebbles]. According to the partial account written in cuneiform on my precious tablets:

The earthly representative of *Vbslb* [unknown deity] scours a holy mountaintop for small *skthru šēpls* [small rocks, akin to L. *scrupulus*]. On hands and knees, the priest loosens them with the tip of a water-buffalo horn, then sets them in a basin held by three slaves. When enough pebbles have been collected, he inserts one between the sandaled toes of each worshiper, who must then walk for a single '*nwwko* [unit of unknown duration].

One bas relief has fractured and left only a great toe. That tablet I placed with the others in a sturdy box, which will turn up as a blessing for posterity.



My endeavor began with an exhortation. Jane Cundiff urged readers of the *Floyd Press* (April 11, 2013) to mow less grass, and instead plant clover and wildflowers to help feed bees and butterflies, insects that seem threatened on several fronts. Earlier that year I had saved one honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) in Paris by taking a spoon and plucking its scrambling bottom out of an espresso cup, so why not undertake a wholesale rescue?

The Wellses agreed to an environmental compromise. Marge would once again plant wildflowers in the uninviting soil of one hillside of weeds, blackberry bushes, and volunteer trees. Across Annie Lane to the west I would plant clover in bare clay spots that spread erratically over a semi-grassy field.

Our acquaintance, Bill Conk (who in an earlier scripture recalled his hirsute sweetheart), had scraped the area somewhat less bumpy with tractor & blade. Of accent Brooklyn, Buddhist of outlook, he accepted a small amount of money along with all of the hemlock from our dismantled deck, planks that he would repurpose as a shed. They would then be replaced by

Trex™, a composite material that would not buckle or splinter. Afterward we planted the area in grass—a “monoculture” to the uncompromising Jane—in order to make a rough yard to accommodate grandchildren and to accentuate a clearing between house and up-growing forest.



Author vs. reality.

Anyone who plants in this area must deal with remnants of what might be called the White Peaks. Icy and heaven-threatening, they had cashed in over the eons, leaving change scattered all around, coins big and small, drab and colorful. Although obstructions to blades, seeds, and roots, the stones had fed rock-crushers during the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, as Jean Thomas Schaeffer remembers. "My grandma was paid a total of \$100 for fifty dump-truck loads of rocks—all from her cornfield, just after harvest. She said it was the only time she ever 'got something for nothing.'" (1)

Bill's scraper had shoved thousands of our rocks into miniature lateral moraines. Over the next couple of years, the largest ones had been plucked and hauled from the field to a line along the downhill side of the driveway as a marker and barrier for vehicles negotiating snow (and a couple of times failing). For several hours this job required two strong members of Young Life, who helped pay for summer camp with rocky bucks.

An inventory of the tools:

- * a level-head rake with twelve sturdy tines,
- * a spade,
- * a flexible rubber tub,
- * a faded red wheelbarrow.

Kneeling in my dirt-stained work-pants, I would rotate the head of the rake to the left and jab its left corner into the clay. To protect my generous scalp from cold, wind, or sun, I wore the cloth hat given to me by Tom after I'd lost mine—broad-rimmed, chin-strapped. To protect my knees I wore long trousers that seemed patched by brown dirt. I also sported yellow-orange leather gloves with reinforced palms, frequently taking off the right one so as to pluck stones more easily.



Besides the sense of touch, no fewer than three others helped do the job.

Vision let me spot many pebbles and rocks that lay on the surface. These I would rake or pluck up. Others stuck part-way out, and still others revealed themselves only while being pried from hacked clay, reborn. Sometimes the tilling process required me to distinguish between a clod that pretended to be a rock and vice versa, no doubt a chip of “morphodite.” I could tell a stone not only by its edges but sometimes by its color when not the usual dirt-brown. My prospecting eyes would find areas where moss hinted at a potential non-roller beneath it that was hogging space for soil and water. Once or twice I turned up a cherry pit, and two or three times a dark rock resolved into a hickory shell.

Hearing allowed me to perceive a scrape or clink that meant “fragment.” Several times his sense also registered the duller sound of a root left when the area had been clear-cut and bulldozed. Ears also confirmed that when I tossed a stone toward the tub or wheelbarrow, it had plunked, banged, or vanished in the grass.

Balance operated partly with such oculomotor skills and partly with tiny crystals called otoliths—i.e., ear-rocks. How appropriate for my quest as I tried to stay upright on knees or feet, lean forward, or twist.

Reach farther. Poke harder. Quit jabbing & prying and start probing the edges. Give up, stand up, pick up (the shovel). Senses wired me as to the degree of force needed to dump anything from a sizable trophy to a pebble in the wheelbarrow. When this vessel became too gravity-grudging, it said *Lift by handles, dump into barrow*.

Before getting on my feet to fetch the shovel, I would leave the end of the rake-handle pointed at the next hidden rock to be dislodged. A couple of times I quit hoping for extraction, reasoning that bees wouldn't care about a tiny patch of missing clover. Once I consoled myself: “This one might instead serve as home plate.” Another time I had to shovel deeply around an iceberg-like remnant that, luckily, had broken in half underground so I could carry it to the moraine or rock garden in two trips.

Sometimes one of my finds crumbled to potential slurry that would eventually inch its way down, down to the ditch-stream that paralleled Rt. 221, crossed beneath Annie Lane, and blended with Dodd Creek. Sometimes I felt as if I was discovering clam shells with that tell-tale “clink.” Or noodling—reaching bare-palmed into a catfish hole. Or shovel-paddling a canoe as I stretched the long handle this way and that, sometimes changing arms, on the swamp-winding Waccamaw

When the wheelbarrow got full enough with pebbles, gravel-sized, and palm-weighting rocks, I pushed it to the crest of our narrowing ridge, then tried to manage its roll down the steep side onto the logging-trail. After tipping the load into some declivity, I zig-zagged the barrow to the top, where I caught my breath and bent over while blood pressure overrode medicine. After two such loads, and about two hours, I pulled the amber gloves onto the handles of the wheelbarrow and stuck their fingers backwards like a whimsical installation.

To my slightly dazed eyes, a set of blisters resembled quartz. It also recalled my first job: would “Grandma” Allen down at the corner want me to sweep her sidewalk? She responded to the eight-year-old with a surprised “I guess.” So down the long series of panels, across Cottage Avenue from those snowy pee-pockets, I waved a broom back and forth. Should I also sweep the

interstices? I guess so. While cleaning one of these cracks every five feet, I passed near the chromium hood-ornament, maybe a swan, of the 1930s Packard that had been backed into the tall bushes and abandoned. At last at the corner of Anthony I met the shorter leg of concrete that extended to the right. But before turning south toward the railroad tracks, what was this white rise on my palm? I stared at a new definition of myself, and after another half-hour and another bulge, they grasped a twenty-five cent piece.

Now out of stoney boredom I tried to focus on ambient sounds. A rooster's mindless *crogito ergo sum*, the tweets and chirps, the breeze swooshing through the grove of white pines planted as a windbreak, the occasional faraway *moo*, and the hum of traffic. The cow-guarding donkey across Epperly Mill Road may have issued its equally loud and cacophonous *Hee-haw*—an outburst tamed in *Winnie-the-Pooh* as *Eeyore* (British sound *eeeah*).

Each day, windy or hot, cold or warm (or both), the earth moist or baked, the weather bright or sprinkling, I would force myself to quit, remembering that earlier sessions had knocked me out. I tried for a one-hour limit, but when I looked around there was an adjoining series of dry rivulets. “If I can just get that one brown spot with its random stones....” When I did manage to unfold legs to feet, I beheld clay tentacles everywhere on the surface. “If I can just get to that bareness around the maple tree....” I noticed that the plot did look grassy from the side, but from above it, inexcusably ill-maintained. I despaired of having a lawn—oops, word forbidden by Barbara Pleasant, a Floydian and contributor to *Mother Earth News*.

No Southern Appalachian gold, or gems such as garnet, amazonite, amethyst, and unakite. No local soapstone, which may have already turned to suds. No fairy stones, i.e., staurolite crystals forged by heat and pressure as the earth's crust formed the Appalachians. Only faux arrowheads as the sun inclined at different angles. No chance of turning up an ancient Roman game-piece carved from marble—like the one Jane and Ken Cundiff spotted in a newly-tilled Tunisian field of Carthage and gave me for my seventieth birthday. (2)

A rainfall exposed previously hidden stones. One day the driveway's expanse of “57” gave me an uneasy start with a rock of unknown integer. Another time I just had to pick up one more stone as I rolled my gear toward the carport, and as I stuck it in my trousers on the way to the retaining wall, I remembered Andrew Stanley's warning from the days when a team of boaters would maneuver a large seine to trap southward-migrating mullets: while stacking pile-shares on the beach, “Don't put one in your pocket!”

I tried not to think “I know you're there” about a concealed stone. In a troubling development, a few clusters seemed to reappear! I realized that while replanting our Christmas tree outside, I had shoveled out debris from the new location and used it to fill several holes in the future bee-preserve. But rarely did I have a consequential thought. Was I becoming *The Man with the Rake*, a variation of the painting and poem?

Now and then I tried to recall the role of stones in my past. Watching my father magically skip one atop a lake. Or hurling one from the backyard at a curly-haired boy who dared to walk home from school on my street. (Wait—it was a Stayman apple I threw, not a stone.) Hearing the windshield *crack!* as the truck ahead trundled on with a lightened load. As I cut the grass of the public library, hearing a *whack*, and shelving the dented fender of a parked car under “Things Happen.” Learning that in rural Asia, a rock was un-squeezable Charmin. In France, traveling to

St. Raphael and finding myself walking barefoot—not on Myrtle Beach sand but on pebbled pain. Also hiking up Mount Mezenc, a conic heap of boulders, with my colleague and guide, Henry Chambus, then watching the Loire spring from beneath it and head north to the châteaux, rather than south to the Mediterranean, thanks to some geological contusion.

I may have remembered a fossil-rock that Katie, newly nine years old, plucked out of the *jardin* of our house in France. Originally located at the bottom of the sea, it must have been part of the nearby mountains of limestone, *Le Massif de la Chartreuse*. (It became contraband on Delta Airlines.) In this photo, her son Samuel Hope, almost nine, holds the souvenir, its imprint made by the stem of a marine invertebrate of the class Crinoidea (lily-like), phylum Echinodermata.



Fossilized crinoid ossicles,
12.8 ounce rock plucked from
among the big snails.

I might have remembered back to June, 1950, how I was running on the sidewalk in front of my grandfather's house, across the dike along the Columbia River. Stumbling headfirst onto the sidewalk, I carried an injury to my scalp until a doctor pried out its source, a pebble. Quartz rocks along the garden of Mrs. Sharp's Day Care (across from Tommy Hollinger's), exotic of glassy color. The cobblestones in Europe that forced me to get shoe inserts for my over-high arches and oversize boots. I remembered that the word "scruple" originally meant a stone caught in a sandal. And thought of the rock-sided churches constructed in the wilderness of the Blue Ridge area by Bob Childress, a Presbyterian Prometheus. (3)

Once as I surveyed a few random stones, the practice of lapidation did cross my mind—Bible-based execution—along with a disturbing short story by Shirley Jackson called "The Lottery." And in a play by Ben Jonson, that triple pun about King Solomon—"He's got the stone for it"—what was the name of that play?

But most of my brainwork was as superficial as the mountain was friable. "*I must remind you again, Randall, to keep the green tub on your right, so you won't have to look for it.*" "*Good, keep your work area out of the shadow of the wheelbarrow.*" I started to admire my rake and regretted that I had ever down-talked our cheap barrow, even though it required an adjustment to the front bracket every time it dumped stuff. The rake was a Vigoro. Ah, *Volpone*, the play's name.

Yet I did give thought to that quarried angel, stone cold. She stood next to the road day and night, exposed like her open Bible to wind, sun, snow, ice, and rain. Besides the fishy physics, what made me feel uneasy? It was as if the artifact suggested a once-real girl, with a name. Who could laugh, weep, and be wept over? If so, she attained angel-hood at some cost. "Tell me," I thought, "that it's not child sacrifice." As if in a vision, I was in Bible school in the early 1950s while a projector clickety-clicked black-and-white images. A boy my age labored up a mountain with a donkey piled with brush, whereupon his father tied him down on an altar, like a lamb, and hoisted a knife—but ceased at the command of God's winged messenger.



After an hour that always turned into two, I hung the long-sleeved shirt in the tool-room next to pants, their knees stained umber and flaked with dirt. Regarding blotches as badges, I recalled the dusty catcher's uniform of my youth. "*Disgusting*," said Marge. A couple of times I stretched a raincoat out to dry, but I always hung a sweaty t-shirt on the laundry basket and took a shower.

I did witness a single bumblebee that circled a patch of established clover that was flowering another season amid the grass. O, welcome omen! I stood to admire the unpredictable winding course that shaved the air with a tiny electric razor. One Friday evening I crossed paths with Jane downtown and reported the consequences of her easily-made charge to plant bee-treats. Asked to kiss my blister, she graciously did.

Now I had to get outside every day or I felt sluggish. In fact the ore I had been mining transmuted into my own person, so I asked to be called "Rocky." But the arch of one foot complained and my left shoulder twinged from rotating the tines. A "crepitus," Fred decreed, as a physical therapist more skillful than diplomatic. At Marge's encouragement, I took a day off.

Grateful not to tangle with the fire ant (*Solenopsis*) of South Carolina, I did turn up the many-legged crescent of a grub, and once a scrawny worm wriggled over the clay. And what's this? I stopped to let a creature extricate itself from the scruff at the base of grass and weeds. Unsteadily it scrambled up a blade of grass, where it perched and regarded me with close-set black eye-dots, its motion a pleasure after countless inert objects. "*Mes hommages*," it piped.

"I beseech you to do me no harm. Am I not as pretty as I am delicate? These magical wings of starched silk (out they stretched)—I'm told that one waft can change the world. And my filaments above and below—eight of them, threads from the same air-catching fabric. (Dipping its left antenna ceremoniously.) You will find nothing more delicate in this patch of land, which you will agree is rather uncultivated. *S'il vous plaît, laissez moi tranquille*. Dangerously exposed upon this verdancy, I risk becoming a *collation*."

Off I knee shuffled.

One morning I hauled four bags of Black Kow compost in the Subaru with the intention of covering areas that were especially torn up by missing rocks. Loaded at Slaughters' Nursery, the stuff had been aerated by mushrooms grown in trays. Flavor notes to honey.

One surprising day I stood up, looked around, and pronounced myself finished. The path below appeared somewhat leveled, the half-acre exposed only an occasional intruder, and my palm sported a constellation of calluses above the heart-line. Not long afterward a couple of gents played Spanish lyrics on a radio while tossing shovel-loads of compost from a trailer to most of the spots I had prepared. I myself bought two fifty-pound sacks of tiny white pellets.

Now I scanned the heavens like any farmer. One auspiciously gray morning I pushed the rolling fountain of a spreader over the largest composted spots, then hand-sowed many others with the pellets. But after only 173 drops of rain fell, I had to attach a line of hoses to the above-ground cistern and empty its modest collection of roof-water onto the crop. Even then, as I pulled the

end of the hoses all around and made a spray with my gloved hand, what should I detect poking out here and there?



Viewed from the deck, a segment of lateral moraine assembled from eroding mountain.

NOTES

1. *Raised on Songs and Stories: A Memoir of Place in the Blue Ridge. Floyd, Virginia:* Harvestwood Press, 2014, p. 81
2. The Cundiffs' adventures abroad encompassed a career rather than a journey. Jane's memoir: *Cobras, Kids & Pyramids: Adventures of a Teaching Couple in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt.* New Haven Press: Floyd, VA, 2015. Available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).
3. Richard S. Davids, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.

Scripture 18

Property II: "Rapunzel" by Zelinsky



Relic in Floyd, Virginia.

"Look at that neat tower!" exclaimed Gigi to Sidney. "It reminds me of Rapunzel!"

Driving to the grocery store, they passed an old brown-brick, conical silo, its cedar-shingled top framing a small dormer window. Although it once overlooked a meadow, it now surveyed the parking lot of a grocery store. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel," repeated Sid, "who's that?" Gigi was unable to remember the tale adequately, so she drove to the library and took out a volume by that

name. The text by Paul O. Zelinsky combines features of several literary versions, including the Grimm brothers' (itself influenced by earlier stories). His paintings inspired by those of the Italian Renaissance—with its relish for color and light, garments with shape and weight, variegated facial expressions, accurate anatomy, and naturalistic perspective (*Wikipedia*). To leaf through the volume is to understand why its cover bears the golden Caldecott Medal. (1)

The painter turns earth to art both figuratively and literally. For although he uses some synthetic pigments, “There was a lot of raw sienna and raw umber, basically the dirt of Siena and Umbria, uncooked.” (All quotations refer to email correspondence with Mr. Zelinsky, 2011). He also used Naples Yellow, one of his favorites before it was declared toxic.



Art: materials as product. Courtesy Paul O. Zelinsky.

In the first illustration the smiling parents-to-be embrace each other while intertwining their fingers on the woman's belly. Her robe is the hue of apricot, perhaps another reason the scene might be called Testing for Ripeness. Through the open window, indirect sunshine promises a bright future and helps render the couple beatific.

In the next painting, the garden of a Sorceress looks not only enclosed but confined. It ends at a high wall that the sun brightens without touching the plants directly. Such vegetation is doubly compressed because it is pruned, espalier-ed, bonsai-d, and otherwise manipulated into designs. A couple of them resemble green snowmen-guards, topiaries that hint at bewitched people. Such a reduction is also made by the two statues, humans aestheticized. One is a marble mother—warm only in sunshine—who stands holding a baby that will never breast-feed or teethe. A lizard

prowls the grounds as a cold-blooded version of a cat. The base of the fountain itself is enclosed by a short octagonal wall.

At the courtyard of the Sorceress, the only human being visible is the one who gazes down into the garden. This living mother-to-be craves the rapunzel plant—i.e., the rampion, which the author defines as a flower with an edible leaf and tuberous root (Zelinsky 1997). Her husband must climb down into the garden-redoubt because it allows no access by lower door or window. The vegetable successfully purloined, it now causes the woman a mind-altering experience—an almost sexual reaction that is uncongenial to the repressive garden. This plant becomes even more fraught when she declares that she'll die without another batch.

As the husband kneels once again at the blossoms, the Sorceress leans behind him and spreads her arms and cloak like a grimacing anti-angel. Her offer: the child for the plant. A diptych follows, unaccompanied by words. Its left panel shows the still-recumbent mother, pale, her orange hair faded, along with the midwife and the seated father. He can barely watch as (on the right panel) the new owner tilts her face close to the baby's in a perversion of the traditional Madonna and Child. She then bears the newborn past its own cradle, as empty as it is fancy, into the sunlit doorway. (2) Property now of the Sorceress thanks to a No Trespassing garden.



Does Rapunzel faintly echo the Eden story in Genesis? Both tell of a wife who consumes a prohibited plant and who enlists her husband as a co-conspirator. Both tell of punishment for disobedience, and by exile—Adam and Eve from the garden, and the later heroine into the wilderness. Jehovah and the Sorceress are gardeners who set limits on human beings, one by a command, the other by enclosure. The male is a divine figure described as a human being, the female as a human with magical powers. Jehovah forbids his creatures to understand good and evil because he wants them to remain in a state of innocence, while the Sorceress regards human beings only as a threat to her possessions—one of which becomes Rapunzel. (The author-illustrator shared his view that the Sorceress herself partly intended to keep the child innocent.)

Do both of these powerful figures, God and the Sorceress, resemble single parents? In the next illustration she perverts maternal love by benignly working her needlepoint while the forfeited girl dances outside like a child of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve. In the background the pond and river symbolize the freedom she will lose.

The Stepmother, as the heroine calls her, evidently feels her anti-growth impulse renewed, for she drags her charge through the woods as if from puberty. She now even perverts the life-enhancing power of art by building a marble keep, magnificent in height, architecture, and décor. The campaniles suggest the bars of a prison or the stripes of an inmate's uniform. Lavender petals top the base and clash with the geometric facade and hexagonal shape—flowers transformed to architectural decoration, somewhat like the girl herself, who now must serve as its focal point. In the next scene the Sorceress uses her physical prowess to visit her possession like a miser tending a gold-hoard. She scales the tower with grotesque gymnastics, her only instrument hair, a gorgeous, luxuriant, and lively sign of growth—carrot-top for sure.

The story does not touch on the damage wrought upon someone who is mentally and socially foot-bound. Held in near-solitary confinement—even a premature tomb—she stays unchanged, uncomplaining, and beautiful, not to mention elegant. (3) Although a human being, she has a kinship with the plant that saved her life and gave her name. Conceived in the spring, she reveals touches of a fertility-spirit, and the tower may suggest a lofty root-cellar that holds dormant life. As another hint of her close association with nature, *she sings!* To the birds. A vocal outpouring emphasized because her words are quoted only once in the text. So it is her voice that charms the Prince. In this tale the heroine herself, unlike Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, is the enchanter, so her melody suggests the power of art to grace the world. (4)

The Prince climbs upward in a reversal of the direction taken by Rapunzel's trespassing father. For the first time, the young woman beholds a man, like Miranda in *The Tempest*, who has been isolated by father and island. This new character's royal status, following the convention of many a tale, is an idealization. Luckily he's a prince of a guy, so his kindness overcomes her fear. The two eventually conduct a token ceremony to solemnize their mutual impulse.

One day the gray-haired warden understands why a gown has become tight: *Gravida 1*. So the overflowing hair is not the only sign of a displaced life as it strives to find an outlet. Although the text reports Stepmother's anger, the painting also suggests fear. She may be the most complex character, full of contradiction and unknowable motivation. Wicked with Issues. She is also a classy dresser who disdains the unimaginative black garb of a witch in favor of dark green. ("Terre verte is one of the main components of her gown," noted the artist.) In contrast to the formal setting of inlaid floor and ornate table-stand, the Sorceress lunges against her backward-bending insubordinate, their robes in turmoil.

In the next scene, of two pages, the older woman, her eyes crazy-wide, her hair gray against orange, snips off the offending excrescences while the girl cups her hands around her temples and squeezes her eyes shut. Both figures lean out of the tower onto its dizzying view. The next leaf offers a proleptic vision of the tiny Rapunzel, isolated within a rectilinear frame near the middle of a desolate, waterless landscape. Eventually she gives birth to twins, a hint that nature stifled is nature redoubled.

Meanwhile the blithely ignorant prince climbs the rope of hair again only to be shocked by a figure of wrinkled, vindictive, and sarcastic fury. His humanity is emphasized when it's his grief, not her push, that causes him to let go, dis-tressed. Plummeting to the ground, he survives at the cost of his eyesight. After wandering through the land with a cane, he hears the familiar voice and rushes toward his dear wife. Their reunion is painted with such boulder-tilting and costume-swirling energy that the image appears almost cinematic. To the artist (email) this and the birth scene are like bookends, both of them two-page spreads devoid of text.

When Rapunzel embraces the prince, she sheds two tears into his eyes, drops that restore his sight. Magic of her own, these twins suggest that love can be medicinal. The tears invite comparison with the spittle that Jesus mixed with dirt to anoint the eyes of a blind man, John 9:6. They also offer warm and salty reminders that this tale elevates the generous instinct to bear fruit over the selfish one to prevent or constrain it—procreation over proprietorship. Unlike the Eden story, *Rapunzel* does not prize obedience, nor does it view human beings as wretches, unless cruelly mistreated. Love is not divine but earthly, both fecund and healing.

The final painting forms a tableau of the second-generation family in affectionate repose, the father's arm behind the mother, whose own arm curves down to touch one of the orange-haired children.

With its heartwarming conclusion, the book (like its sources) avoids any reminder that the heroine knows no parents and the twins no grandparents. The tableau, however, might be imagined as the left half of a diptych whose right half portrays the elderly couple as they hold hands near a cobwebbed cradle.

In our correspondence, Mr. Zelinsky mused upon the tale's stock, upbeat ending. It would be too incongruous, he observed, if the story involved actual people. But the narrative is art rather than life. It does not offer a moral even though it describes "persevering and life going on" for both the prince and his bride. Yet as with other fairy- and folk-tales (like the better ones of the Grimm brothers), the very weirdness of the clashing tones is appealing. "Things happen, and then other things happen. Get used to it, and declare a happy ending with what you've got."

NOTES

1. *Rapunzel*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1997. The Caldecott Medal "is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children." (ALA/ALSC Caldecott Medal Home Page.)

2. "I think that maybe the rapunzel planting was a setup," asserts the author-illustrator, "and the Sorceress actually wanted the baby all along." As for the statues—one woman with a stick and another with a child—they "make sense given who the Sorceress is and what she thinks about." Regarding the tower she later constructs, he calls the Sorceress "an artist, a very good draftsman." He sees her as wanting to recapture her own youth and feels that she does not intend for Rapunzel to suffer.

3. The drive to control someone out of radically perverse affection is described in "A Rose for Emily," a short story by William Faulkner (1930), and in *The Collector*, a novel by John Fowles (1963). After Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, 130 Protestant women were confined for the rest of their lives in the Tower of Constance, Aigues-Mortes (museedudesert.com.)

4. Does this book—text and illustrations—invite a musical version? A live-action film could take on the challenge, given the outdoor scenes and the sensational action. An animated version could be powerful if it avoids tangential-stories and oversize eyes. Opera? But a chorus would overwhelm the intimate domestic situations and the spare cast. Why not a stage-musical? It would select a minimum of scenes, as does the book. But it would need to represent the climbing-down-and-up as well as plummeting. Surely a welcome challenge to director, cast, and composer! As a further invitation, here is a quick draft of potential scenes and singers.

- * *Duet*: Above, parents rhapsodic about the pregnancy.
- * *Solo*: Wife longs for the rampion as she peers out a high window at the bed of green plants..
- * *Duet*: Excitement about the child and apprehension about the forbidden plant.
- * *Solo*: Husband climbs down to the garden, resolute yet apprehensive.
- * *Duet*: Husband gratefully kneels over plants, while sinister figure hovers and holds forth over him.
- * *Duet*: Joyful parents embrace newborn.
- * *Trio*: Sorceress shows up. Expressions of legalistic righteousness and parental resistance.
- * *Solo*: Sorceress triumphantly removes child from cradle and bears it away.
- * *Duet*: Parents' wild incriminations.

BREAK

- * *Solo*: Rapunzel, grown by some years, dancing.
- * *Duet*: Sorceress, knitting on a swing, joins her in song.
- * *Duet*: Stepmother hauls the shocked girl off to the tower and they struggle while climbing. (Sorceress descends backstage.)
- * *Solo*: Rapunzel sings from window, modified from the same one used by her parents.
- * *Solo*: Prince climbs up by scalp-anchored filaments. Lyrics and music echo those of the earlier-climbing father.
- * *Duet*: Brave-new-world meeting of prisoner and prince, who then disappear.
- * *Solo*: Sorceress scrambles up tower, hopeful, discovers a different meaning of expectant, becomes furious.
- * *Duet*: As the girl fights back, Sorceress cuts the long tresses, fastens them to side of window as a mocking trophy.
- * *Solo*: Prince climbs via long remnant of hair. Hopeful theme again.
- * *Solo*: Sorceress bursts upon him with a threatening aria.
- * *Solo*: Prince falls. Perhaps slowly and stylized; maybe in blackness punctuated with strobe lights; maybe in blackness, not visible, but audible because he cries out. On the ground he discovers his blindness, perhaps singing on darkened stage.
- * *Duet*: Wandering prince meets wife, who cures his blindness with lacrimal magic.
- * *Quartet*: Reunited couple rejoice with newborn.

A possible revision. The new parents rock babies downstage; upstage and behind a scrim, the gray-haired parents rock an empty cradle. The Sorceress pushes an empty swing back and forth atop the bed of rapunzel greens. .

Scripture 19

D & M V: "All the Marbles"

**I have learned very well that if you dip your toe in the Rubicon...
cross it. Cross it hard and violent and play for all the marbles.**

"T. J." Robertson, accused of trespassing in the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.
Roanoke Times, 27 Oct., 2021, p.A5.

Thank you, T.J., for introducing this scripture. Even though "all the marbles" usually refers to a single game, the phrase can encompass the world's tally of rolling Plenitude. These spheres vary as to diameter, weight, color or colors, and composition—glass, clay, steel, plastic, and agate. (1) Not to forget their sounds: the flicking of thumb & knuckle, the rattling or bumping along a surface, the clack-collision with other pieces, the eventual succumbing to static.

Article. Whether there be members with no *terminus ad quem*.

"There can be no comprehensive list," advises *Wikipedia* about map projections that try to wrestle a sphere onto a flat surface (e.g., Mercator). Indeed, the article's "List of Map Projections" pictures more than seventy (accessed Oct. 2021). Declared Dale Chihuly: "We would never exhaust color possibilities of the macchia"—Italian "stain" but with complex artistic features. (Video, Chihuly Glass Collection presented by the Morean Arts Center, St. Petersburg, Florida, 2022.)

The author occasionally asks a server to share one interesting thing about her- or himself: Amber, barista at a Starbucks (photo), gave thought as she toasted a breakfast sandwich: "I lift heavy weights and like to make armor."

- * Victoria, at the restaurant of the sky-floating boat (in "The Window"): "I'm a registered embalmer and funeral director."
- * Brea, at the Parkway Grille: "I write erotic paranormal novels" (amazon.com/author/breaviragh).
- * In Kerrville, Texas, Tai (born 1969) reported that as a para-jumper he had helped rescue pilots shot down in the former Yugoslavia. He saw villages destroyed by the Serbians where all life had vanished except for one small cat. He later worked for the U.S. Park Service waiting on Princess Diana, Buzz Aldrin, and O.J. Simpson & his wife.



By permission @amberthevalkyrie.

- * Eve, in Austin, explained that her mother owned a restaurant in northern Thailand: “I plan to go back and run it, so I’m here learning the business.”
- * Robin: “I spent eighteen months in prison for drunk driving.” Cheerfully animated, she seemed to enjoy freedom.
- * Wanda, at Mickey G’s in Floyd, VA: “I’m a bear magnet”—not only while camping but at home, when the aroma of her husband’s cooking signaled a partly open window.

How many ways can someone be a good or bad neighbor? How many kinds of buttons can be sewn or bullets shot? How many items can dangle from rear-view mirrors or garments from clotheslines? How many “heads” can there be: dope-, lint-, rag-, cheese-, egg-, bone-....

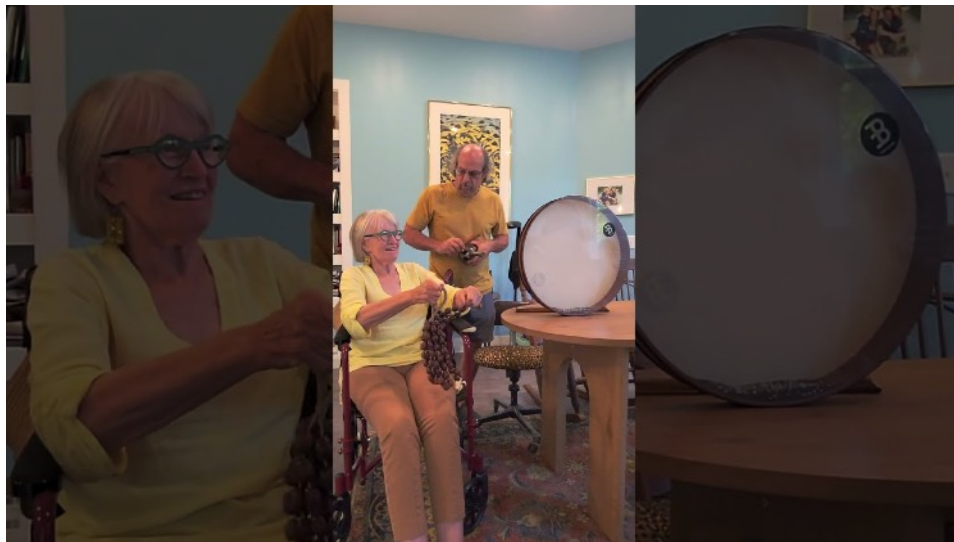
How many businesses named by the formula *adjective + animal*: Blind Pig, Blue Boar, Blue Buffalo, Red Rooster, Red Lion, Purple Cow, Fat Cow, Jolly Ox.... Signs along the highway that comprise three-letter items: “WP Sap Gro Gas & Oil” (Georgia 1963).

Song titles that became revised: “Simply Having a Wonderful Xmas,” “Day Before Yesterday,” “All Shaken Up,” “Mood Puce,” “Over the Rain Barrel,” “Old African American Joe,” “Oh, Susquehanna,” “My Country, It’s of You,” “How Much is that Canid in the Window?”

Randoms by Rubric:

Titles. How many titles—courtesy, professional, ecclesiastic, and royal? Even in *Angel*: *Mister* Bojangles, *Miss* Faith Desrie, *Doctor* Doolittle, *King* Penguin, *President* Lincoln, *4th Baron* Ribblesdale Thomas Lister, *Major General* Lori Robertson.

Musical instruments. Instruments courtesy of Ferrell Lowe: Ocean Drums, Meinl Proto-Berimbau, wooden flute, seed pod shaker, Meini metal shaker, clave, voices. (Roland Meinl Musikinstrumente GmbH & Co. KG is a German musical instrument manufacturer.)



Video: Musical Instruments from *Angel in Goggles* by Randall A. Wells.

Instrumentalists: Marjory Wells, Ferrell Lowe, Katie Wells

Video: David E. Lee, August 2025.

Direct Link: youtube.com/shorts/JBhvdXMwP78

Headgear: Upon moving from one domicile to another, the Wellses uncovered more than thirty head-coverings. Ralph Roe's comment: "A hat garden—in the spring, the fallen seeds from the previous year sprout and grow."



Wenzhen Xiao in Tibetan dance costume.
Thanksgiving Parade, Charlotte, NC, 2025.



Wells collection.



Woodland creature Fred First.

Footgear: It can be displayed ceremonially. Examples: (1) boots hung on fence posts in Texas, (2) tennis shoes lobbed over telephone wires, and (3) facsimiles preserved as a memorial. This third category includes a display on the promenade along the Danube River; it exhibits footwear worn by Jews in Budapest who were shot by Fascist militiamen and thrown into the drink, 1944-45.

Déménagerie: Escaped from a moving van, an enamel salamander winds its tail on a cookie sheet.

Writing pests: Not outright errors, they cause distraction (technical word *noise*). Over decades Randall copied examples from published sources, student papers, and his own writing, either in draft or final form. (2)

A. Sounds alone:

- * Repeated: lay it along the cellar, kissed as a test, accusations of collusion.
- * Full rhyme: “So they would **swing** open thanks to a pair of **wings**” (last word changed in *Angel* to “feathered negatives”).
- * Awkward sound-shifts: “Through **karsts** that **stand stark**”; “Defending his seat this fall, he fell afoul”; “Whose **broad stripes** and **bright stars** / **Through the**.”

B. Sounds and meaning:

- * Homophone (identical-sounding words); *Batts* of insulation. In author’s story of bats, he changed spelling to *rolls*.
- * Homograph (identical spelling): on a **cold** train ride a passenger had a **cold**.

C. Semantics alone—Distracting echo of another word in context or memory:

- * “Accusations that have dogged the American chicken industry.”
- * “...fossils of dog and human feces, many flush with eggs”
- * “The right” (political wing) vs. “The right” (path).
- * “Martyrs’ Square in the dead center of Beirut.”

Author’s *jeu d’esprit*: “Our nest eggs weren’t up to scratch, for a dozen reasons, so we dumb clucks, hard-boiled as we were, hatched a plan for a shell company, but after it incubated, our mistake came home to roost, so we scrambled to get out.”

Silence: Between parts of a classical piece, or after a skillful DJ lets the music echo from the metaphorical cathedral. When I phone my mom in heaven and get no answer. When a nurse walked down the hall past me carrying a paper bag filled with five months of gestation. When after the Haitian earthquake of 2010, we stopped hearing from a child.

Shadows: Also endlessly varied, not as counterfeits but as counterparts. The shadow of a single tree-trunk can mark time in a number of ways. One, with the sun’s daily change in



Horizontal stilts ply Annie Lane.

position, it becomes the hand of a clock. Two, with the earth's annual rotation, its leaves become pages of a calendar. Three it becomes the chronicle of years as it grows longer and wider.

Often static, as when cast by an electric light, shadows can also be dynamic, moving with the flicker of a candle-flame or the play of a breeze on a tree or river; or becoming darker or lighter with the motion of the earth as it varies the intensity of sunlight. These photon-barriers can range from unnoticed to darkly vivid, from pleasing to spooky to ominous. In "The Loudest Voice," a short story by Grace Paley (1959), a Jewish girl avoids the shadow of a Christmas tree as she walks.

Complimentary products available to guests in hotels and motels, as well as aboard ships. They vary as to their functions, brands, names, colors, and packaging.

Items pictured here, with all their brand names trademarked: shower cap, soap bars, shampoos, conditioners, après shampoo, body lotion, cotton swabs and balls, shoe cloth, hand sanitizer, eye gel, teas (twelve kinds), creamer, sugar, sugar substitute, coffee stirrers, cups, cup-cozies, paper napkins, plastic forks and knives, iodized salt, pepper, ketchup, Tabasco, Tic Tacs, and a single Thank You mint.

Paper prophecies: Will teeth ever crackle open a fortune cookie and reach an inauspicious vacuum? Randall's recent prophecy: "Your horizon will soon broadened." Did it count if I picked up the slip from a hall floor?

Proper nouns created by adding a space and a letter:

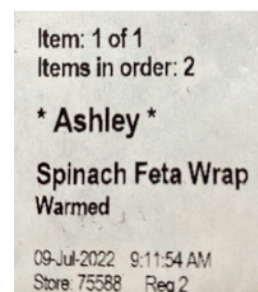
Rufus M and Trespassers W
Jumped in their Henry J,
to visit the Circle K. "Hello!
Guys, I hope it won't trouble you,"
Saxophoned Kenny G,
"To get me a brush head for Oral B
and a package or two of Jell-O.
I've got a gig at the Hungry i,
Maybe a bottle of Emergen-C."

Receipts: Subcategory Food—and in the photo at right, a member of that subdivision, *Dropped on the Airport Floor*. Plenitude warmed and unique—as to who, what, how, how many of a group, how prepared, when, and where.

Reasons for tossing out a dish of food: In Randall's experience: (1) Tapioca pudding that required a half-cup rather than the mistaken whole box, so into a Connecticut field sailed the thick, burned pancake.



Souvenirs being classified by Alice and Julien, overseen by Hopper of the Abundant Tummy.



(2) Rotten fish oil, exposed belatedly when poured onto the completed recipe. (3) Thanksgiving turkey buried in the yard after the newly-widowed Dudley forgot to turn on the daylong oven. (4) The remainder of Alice’s Thai-takeout after the dog took a share.

Cookie cutters: A carousel at Sur La Table included “Angel” and “Labrador Retriever.”

Kinds of scrip—i.e., non-commercial forms of currency. Company chits can be used only at the employer’s store, and land scrip owes you territory. Others include vouchers, token coins such as subway tokens, IOUs, arcade tokens and tickets, and points on some credit cards” (“Scrip,” *Wikipedia*, accessed Nov. 2021).

Bills of paper currency: How many designs and denominators are at this moment being slipped into wallets, envelopes, hands, lottery machines, scanty costumes, and tables (or under them)?



“10 to the 12th power dollars.” From the billfold of T. Hollinger.

E-mail signatures certainly do not end with *minischnauzer* and *mommylifts*.

Prime numbers: Like 7, as well as the unpredictable intervals between them—they have no terminus in sight. Compare the evasive final decimal of Pi.

Evangelical clothing: Faith-fashion includes no end of nails, lambs, and testimonials—as advertised by elevatedfaith.com (accessed July 22, 2022). The author was unsurprised by *Jesus is King* but baffled by *Jesus Made me Kosher*. (Such clothing, by the way, is illegal in determinedly secular France, where even a hijab is forbidden in the classroom, perhaps to be replaced by a generous scarf.)

Mistreatment of young women in folktales:

- * Physical and emotional abuse (“Cinderella”)
- * Mutilation (“The Girl with No Hands”)
- * Potential wolf-cookie (“Red Riding Hood”)
- * Threat of cannibalism (“Hansel and Gretel”)
- * Threat of beheading (*Scheherazade*)
- * Agonizing dilemma (“Rumpelstiltskin”)
- * Cruel possessiveness (“Rapunzel”)

Human servitude? Another continuum. It encompasses slavery, peonage, serfdom, indentured servanthood, and maybe the position of governess (in the view of Jane Austen's Emma), forced marriage, sex trafficking, impressment of sailors, and the military draft. Metaphorical servitude?

In *Walden*, Thoreau regards neighboring farmers skeptically: "Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt?"

Ralph Roe has one answer:

I grew up on a dairy farm that was marginal, but my parents did not have the funds to acquire a neighbor's farm to have more cattle and crops. We were stuck. My only solution was to leave the farm, and I did so happily. Those darn cows refused to take a day off, not even Christmas, Easter, July 4, nor my birthday—they had to be milked twice a day which leaves little time in between for cultural activities like reading. My brother and I were in the same position as slaves, except I could escape to college if I was awarded a scholarship. Dairy farming is self-slavery for those who own a farm, unless it is a huge one. (By email, 2022.)

Getting robbed: You don't have to stay in the YMCA of Istanbul to have your gloves stolen, or to be mugged in the hotel park (as reported by an internet scammer). Other attested circumstances: (1) sitting aboard an architectural-tour boat on the Chicago River; (2) taking a shower in a motel room in Lanett, Alabama, while the family is at the pool; and (3) wandering through an elegant confectionery in Zurich while looking at all the sweets:

I noticed an attractive man in a trench coat staring at my companion as we moved about. I stared back at him but he didn't flinch, though he certainly felt my gaze. As we left the shop I felt for my purse—and in a flash realized the man's pretty female friend had used the moment my attention was captured to oh-so-lightly pull my wallet out of my overstuffed handbag. The next day a lady from a fine linen store phoned to say she had found my wallet tossed in a stack of towels. Inside was my passport and all the contents sans cash, \$800. (By email, Janna Bernard.)

Types of Irony: Probably not exclusive, often overlapping, all of them working to some degree by mockery that diminishes the person or situation.

Verbal: "King of the Jews."

Dramatic, as if seen by an audience but not a character. Othello, about to strangle his innocent wife: "O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart / and <mak'st> me call what I intend to do / murder, which I thought a sacrifice!"

Of expectation:

- * A young couple sailing on the *Nova Scotia* return to Ireland from Boston in search of a better life for their unborn child—some years before "The Troubles."
- * Jim Croce records "Time in a Bottle," 1972; dies 1973.

Cosmic: Hints of MacBeth's mysterious fate are stirred in the pot of the Weird Sisters.

Swiftian: Does Jonathan really want English people to eat Irish babies? He expresses outrage at their treatment of that country by inventing a character with numbskull morality, like this letter writer.

November 2024.

Dear Mr. Musk:

I rejoice that you may be appointed Director of Efficiency for the federal government. I humbly offer one suggestion: there are 11 million undocumented immigrants in the USA (impossible to count). But there are only 7.5 million Jews (although impossible to define). Why go to the trouble and expense of searching out and transporting so many illegals? When Jews are in plain, often prominent, sight, and no strangers to being rounded up?

As a bonus for efficiency: those doing the removal need not be paid! Because they can harvest unneeded vehicles, china, artwork, menorahs to be melted, etc.

I realize that when Jews were other-located in Europe, they abandoned many dogs and cats. But to assuage your concern, hungry brown people can repurpose Wags and Puss.

Sincerely, Randall A. Wells

Spamhandlers: On every corner of the Internet, they seek credibility by first detailing circumstance—like those in *Gulliver's Travels*, which seamlessly move from shipboard minutiae to miniature men. They bid for sympathy by reporting dramatic mistreatment, disease, or violent accidents; by invoking religion; and by using supposedly-female writers:

- * *Mr. Adam Sallam*, from Burkino Faso is “imposition” to reclaim and inherit US \$37.5 million dollars from a dormant account.
- * *Miss Vanessa Amingo* from the Ivory Coast, who lost her mother during her birth, reports that her father was poisoned by his brother, who is the manager of her late father’s cuttings and export company.
- * *Mr. Sebastian Matveikova*, a bank manager, discovered \$18 million and promised the Almighty that he would find a foreign partner. etc. “Please make sure that the motherless babies and the widowers over there in your country will receive this money successfully as I promise to almighty.”
- * *Mrs. Gina Blair*: “May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you i am very sorry for intruding on your privacy.” At 59 years old, she suffers from breast cancer. “I have an important message for you from the lord before I pass away, so my dear I will like you to mail me on missionarygina@hotmail.com....”
- * *Mr. Philip Thomas* had a late client who died of kidney failure after years of struggling with the disease and left no next-of-kin. *Dr. Yasir Khan’s* client died in an air crash, as did a late foreign customer of the bank in Ouagadougou (*Mr. Mehrshad Rehman*, Account Manager) who left an abandoned bank account.

- * *Mrs. Elliana (or Elina) Ouedrago (or Ouedrag)* is stranded in Turkey, handbag stolen. She writes with heavy tears in her eyes, great sorrow in her heart, with a “cancer problem,” and with a “stroke sickness.” Having grown up in an orphanage, she instructs the reader to use 70% of the money for charity and take the remainder for personal use.... “Fore More Details contact my privet email below.”
- * *Major General Lori Robinson* was in a car wreck, after which \$95 million was discovered in boxes here at the ISIS hideout in Syria.
- * Among such mendicants is none other than Miss Faith Desrie, a French citizen of the Ivory Coast:
Please, it is my intention to request for your assistance to be my foreign partner/trustee to transfer my inheritance money from here [location unspecified] to your country so I can come over and establish a new life because my uncles want to kill me here because of the money my father left me in the bank.... Because my father deposited the money into a Suspense account I am hiding my self in one hotel.... Please dear consider the painful condition I am now and help me.... Thanks and God bless you.

NOTES

1. “Marble (toy). *Wikipedia*. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marble_\(toy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marble_(toy)), accessed July 2022.
2. This undertaking was inspired by H.A. Gleason, Jr., the author of a textbook I used at the University of Connecticut. For some reason he taught at the Hartford Seminary Foundation. So now in January of 1966 I heard him urge students to collect unusual turns of English. I was able to take the weekly night-class by making the round trip in segments. (1) By thumb to Manchester. (2) By local bus to Hartford. (3) By foot to the institution. (4) After class, by a ride from a fellow-student up the interstate to the Storrs turnoff. (5) When he quit the course, by thumb, standing along the dark highway, cooled even further by slipstreams, and holding up a black folder that bore the white letters UCONN. (Stranded once, I had to call a friend for a ride.) (6) Dropped off at the intersection with the local highway, by thumb to the turnoff at Hunting Lodge Rd. (One driver of a Dodge Dart and a wide brim over the side-glancing whites of his eyes, paid me a visit the next day, but luckily I was substituting for a Dad with the neighbor boy, so I could send off the creep.) (7) By foot along unlighted to my trailer. In retrospect, this academic venture was riskier than the global trip experienced four years earlier. *Had I known*. There could even be danger on Hunting Lodge Rd. Around Halloween of 1965, a young woman and I had been hurt by a pumpkin tossed from a passing vehicle. I wonder if these rustic truckers became drafted and, if so, if they gained a perspective on T.J. Robertson’s “hard and violent.”

Scripture 20

Geodyssey V: "Gom!"



This rambling former British courthouse dispensed health and hospitality.

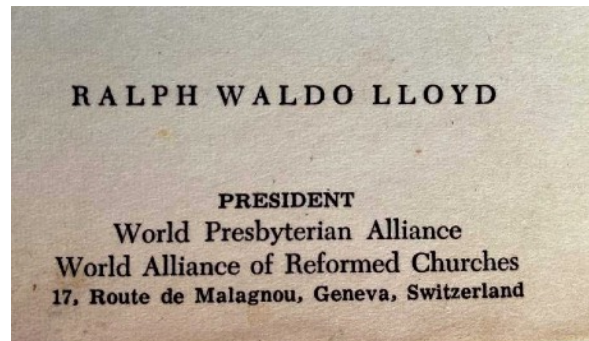
Dr. Robert A. Foster, with his low-voiced gravitas, headed the nearby Christian Training Institute, a place I never visited or understood. (ctibhs-sialkot.peb.edu.pk/) In our rare conversations, one unfamiliar word stood out: Ayub (—*ah-yoob*), the name of the man who seemed to rule. Mrs. Aurel Foster, with a cheerful sparkle, ran the household, which furnished a generous afternoon tea, and she once broke up a loud fight between the two cooks.

In a Jeep-like vehicle she made daily forays to do mission work, returning with December-red cheeks. Once she demonstrated an easel with flop-over sheets of paper; it displayed words and pictures such as *kitab* = book. I gathered that the complex sometimes offered a refuge for other missionaries, but I glimpsed only one, who had a connection with Billy Graham's alma mater—where I had once attended the evangelist's huge revival. When I expressed a reservation about the school, Mrs. Foster asked in surprise, "What's wrong with Wheaton College?" Subject dropped.

In a small, windowless room around a corner, Tom and I shared a bed, so to speak, with the former president of Maryville College and his wife, who had recently visited CTI. I had last seen the venerable Dr. Lloyd, born in 1892, during Chapel service the previous May. Following the announcement of his retirement after three decades, he walked slowly offstage-left as the

students sang “Time, like an ever-rolling stream,/Bears all its sons away.” (Isaac Watts, hymn originally titled “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” 1708.)

Right off, I shorted out a metal coil while trying to heat a cup of water. My gastro-intestinal problem, however, improved under the supervision of an American doctor from Kansas, Orville Hamm, head of the Christian Hospital in Sialkot. Sulphaquanidine and Amebaquin, three tablets thrice daily.



Card left for the Fosters.

Mrs. Brazil, the wife of an accountant from England who had come to assist CTI, sewed up the armpit of my coat, torn from hoisting a backpack, as we shared a laugh per stitch.

When he requested that Tom and I register as itinerants at the police station, to stay in good favor with the city, we did. A couple of times I treasured the company of his lovely daughter Kathy, an antidote to the rough masculinity of travel. When our hosts invited the area’s missionaries to Christmas dinner, I suggested that we play musical chairs, and the result was comical near-chaos, the heartiest laughter coming from a rather severe lady in a fox-broa coat.

“I remember trying to call the Fosters,” wrote Tom a half-century later, “when we arrived at the train station and that it took from a little after nine in the morning until 4:30 p.m. to get through. It turned out this was their first phone call in thirty-eight years, so it must have involved a great deal of commotion.” He continues:

In Sialkot I stayed with a Muslim family, although Dr. Foster insisted I later give the Christians equal time, which I did. One memory is of having breakfast in the Muslim house and eating a curry so strong that tears came to my eyes. On inquiring, it seemed as though poor people eat only two meals a day, so if breakfast is very spicy, they remember that they have in fact eaten.

At my arrival I remember looking through a perforated screen separating the cooking from the living area. Beyond the screen were girls and a lot of giggling and smiles. My host invited them in and introduced me as a “cousin,” so since I was part of the family, they were allowed to visit and talk with us. This made living there much more comfortable and the evening more casual. At night they would bring the water buffalo into the house to keep it safe and to provide body heat to the rest of us.

I also remember walking down a road once and seeing a young girl, maybe nine or ten, who would pick up the droppings of the buffalo and make patties to fit into her basket. This seemed strange, and when I passed close to her she looked up and said “Good morning” as clear as day. I about fainted. People told me that American cows were not so valuable as they only gave milk or meat. The water buffalo was much better because it made fuel (manure) and gave heat to the house at night. It also did work like running the cane mills, provided transportation when hooked to a cart, and furnished milk and meat at the end of its usefulness. It was a complete use of what the poor beast had to give.

I re-read my mother's letters. My father occasioned a failure of nerve when he announced a planned trip to Nuremberg on business. Maybe I could retrace my steps and meet him: Pakistan to Iran, to Turkey, to Greece, to Yugoslavia, to Italy, to Switzerland, to Germany. Would Tom come along? If not, would it be ethical to see him eastward alone, this time not from O'Hare but from No'where?

I also re-read the letter announcing the death of Jim Gamble, my best friend at Maryville College. There would be no second overnight stay at his parents' house in Morristown, Tennessee. No second gift of a drawing affixed to the door of 423 Carnegie, my dormitory room, after I admired it. A month before the start of the world-trip, I learned that he had contracted leukemia, so I raided my travel fund and flew to Knoxville. There I pushed him and his solemn wit in a wheelchair as his parents looked on gratefully. Before returning to Chicago, I took a Star Line bus to Maryville, where I happily ran across who else but Liz Foster, who was fetching her stored trunk for her own journey to a different college.

In late December I stared at a deck-style tape-recorder as Dvorak's *Symphony of the New World* unwound reel-to-reel. And I half-heartedly poked around the bookshelves, where a medical textbook explained palpation, and a novel, maybe a collection of poems, promised strawberry wine, maybe dandelion. A few bicycle rides around the bright, cool, bright air of the "canton" (canton) were therapeutic. The faraway Himalayas of Jammu-Kashmir loomed rosy-cream on the horizon.

One day I emerged for a walk through the surrounding verdure when two green and yellow birds flapped to the top of a tree: parrots! Another time I learned that the bicycling Mrs. Foster had once crashed into a water buffalo. Another time she directed the cook: "Aj sham ko apple pie bunalay." Mrs. Brazil opened her bedroom door and out flitted a mongoose. When we heard about a traveling actor who would bring Shakespeare to Sialkot, we soon noted a motorized Gypsy-wagon parked outside a school. Inside, many boys laughed when the thespian played Juliet, his imitation of feminine voice unacceptable, so the headmaster ushered the lads out.

At last, feeling well enough to travel alone on a side trip to India, I took a rattling coach to Lahore, a place with its own fuming buses, motorbikes with unmuffled fusillades, and cross-legged sidewalk scribes. I then set boots-to-train across the border with India (a junction still nervous after the catastrophic Partition of India in 1947). In Amritsar a rich pall of smoke-food-sewage hung at dusk over the streets. A little girl ran past me and saluted by crouching, peeing, and sprinting away. A second train (direction uncertain) carried me on an all-day trip to Dehra Dun in the foothills of the Himalayas. As the taxi hair-pinned up to a former British hill station, other passengers stared outside and exclaimed "Snow!" But I spotted long-tailed chatterers in the trees and thought "Monkeys!"

I hiked up the steep path through Mussouri, encountering a man whose huffing servants carried him in a sedan chair, and reached the adjacent Landour. There, a Christian boarding school, Woodstock, was headed by the father of my classmates. No students around because winter meant vacation, while in summer, the school furnished a refuge from the heat. During my cordial stay with Dr. Donald and Mrs. Joy Rugh, I enjoyed hearing a few Indians speak English in a singsong cadence, and hearing about an appreciated staff member who was learning Hindi or whatever with more determination than ability. Mrs. Rugh explained that this outpost near the

top of the world had “all of the luxuries and none of the necessities.” Her husband gave me a second tutorial in working the recalcitrant toilet. The sky was too cloudy for me to witness the Himalayas—pronounced *himAHLyahs*—so a hike through the foothills seemed useless. To merely sense the nearby upthrust-mass of crags without beholding it was eerie. Especially disappointing after never glimpsing the Matterhorn, the Swiss monument socked in by clouds that had followed us from Boston.

So it was back down the steep hill, lined with a jumble of architecture, to a taxi stand and then Dehra Dun, where I boarded the overnight train. Could I actually claim this entire compartment for myself? Hoping to avoid some last-minute companion, I noted that the windows were barred against thieves. The Maharandy now locked the door to his property, untied the string of the bedroll, and spread it over the thick, black-leather cushion. As wheels began to clunk against rail-joints, they recalled the sound of a tricycle rolling across cracks between sidewalk-panels on Cottage Avenue. Clicking quickened. I awoke in Amritsar eight hours later.



Another tape-winding visit to the *New World*—in a sense the Old World as the symphony echoed from hard surfaces.

Once I pedaled far out in the country to visit Tom in a village—despite my discomfort with poverty, sickness, blind religion, and ignorance. “I think you should understand the old machine,” he declared, with more acceptance than I summoned, “before you build a new one.”

I was touched when Mrs. Foster expressed regret that change would destroy many wonderful old customs. But some things cried out for rectification or abandonment. According to Dr. Hamm, kids ran around barefoot in the omnipresent dung and didn’t make enough hydrochloric acid to kill hookworm eggs that enter through the mouth. Women with young children already had wrinkles. The rule of purdah secluded them from the public eye, partly because a black robe with a facial peephole wound them in their own shadows.

One Sunday Tom and I bicycled through the crowds of people, horses, and water buffaloes of Sialkot, finally making it unscathed to the countryside. We turned off the main road and bounced along the ruts to Buttar, the village where Tom was staying with Schoolmaster Preem and his family, Christians.

That night we attended the village church service, held in the main room of a three-room house. Although lit by only one candle, it glimmered off three water buffaloes as they were led through to the back room. After Tom gave a translated talk about American churches, it was boots back to the Preems’.

Next morning we visited Master Preem’s school, an amalgam of classroom and playground. After singing, three groups sat reading aloud among themselves. Another group sat with their washable writing tablets and bamboo pens while copying words that a girl recited loudly from a book. Another group did calisthenics while yelling in unison. As clouds of smoke from a nearby

cooking-fire sometimes enveloped the schoolyard, villagers stood on roofs or poked their heads over the wall to observe the two “sahibs.” Pupils vied to stand by our chairs and read Urdu aloud. Another time we were invited to eat with a family, and as the father squatted to watch, we each negotiated a plate of curried chicken with spice that brought tears to my eyes. Although it was considered improper to eat with the left hand, I ignored such backwardness.



Brown-hatted Randy in coat, center, receives pupils opposite teacher.

Everywhere we went, guys would yell *Tom!* Even come over to greet us. His prestige in the village was damaged, however, when we tried to fit him, me, and my sleeping bag on one bicycle ride into Sialkot. After several entertaining false starts, I got our contraption rolling along the narrow, raised path between two fields. But heading toward us loomed a pile of sugarcane beneath two legs! I rang and rang the handlebar-bell to no avail, so off into the field we veered, and as we were picking ourselves up, a villager lent Cousin Tom his bicycle.

I undertook another jaunt alone, this one inside Pakistan. By now I was making my way around with some nerve, directions in hand, prodding the chaotic into the schematic. Once again blind yet vocal beggars climbed onto the bus, at least for one palm-out moment. I took the machine to Lahore, where I found my way to the office of a Filipino dentist who practiced by contract for the missionary community. Fishing around in the left pocket of my coat, I withdrew the crown of a molar that had broken off from the top left rear-corner, show-and-tell. The dentist leaned over and struggled time after time to fashion a kind of prosthesis for the stub. Frustrated yet determined, he succeeded.

In Rawalpindi, another contact from Maryville College, Mr. Jim Cummings, whose mother was a longtime member of the staff, met me at the station. As we walked to the school where he taught, we passed the wall of a building where he explained that *cutch*a meant unbaked, and *pukka*, baked. This contrast extended to the quality of anything or anyone—makeshift, shoddy, and even contemptible versus genuine, solid, and admirable. He also reported more than a little homosexuality in the school.

Next day the locomotive, a steel-wheeled, water-boiler of a coal-smoker, echoed between cuts as it chugged uphill toward what people spoke of as wild tribal areas. I got off in Taxila and walked to the rather spartan compound. There, my classmate's father, Dr. O.A. Brown, an ophthalmologist, would annually remove cataracts from hundreds of folks who arrived in long lines, some with a crutch or a youngster under an arm. New Year's Eve found me reading *Exodus*, by Leon Uris. The next day at the ruins—famous for what, I had no idea—a scruffy fellow opened his palms to offer a few bottle-caps and several artifacts. A pair of figures, evidently chiseled off of granite backing, seemed to reflect very different cultures. A coin bore Greek lettering as well as the image of an animal that had trod across the millennia.

While standing on a bluff as well as on the ruins of an ancient town, I was surveying the vast plains below when I became conscious of—a *din*! Was the air suddenly darkening before me? What was that mass of specks? Growing closer and larger, it split into countless wings, thoraxes, and abdomens! The stream somehow bypassed me as it whirled inland in fierce determination: grasshoppers or locusts invading from the time of Alexander the Great.



Mysterious effigies with coin for scale.



Greek untranslated. Passport number perforated, memorized, and, fifty years later, used as a password.

In early January Tom and I bade affectionate farewell to our various hosts. I turned in my rented bicycle and waited for my buddy to mail his hookah to 646 Kenilworth, Glen Ellyn. After sitting in a roundabout for ten minutes, I was surrounded by two dozen people. A few were practicing their English on me when the owner of the shop shoved through the crowd and asserted that the bike belonged to another business. As we argued, the crowd swelled to forty-two. We all traversed the street, where the complainant pointed out that the dealer was closed and he had just spent time fixing the owner's tire. I suggested that when the place opened, he could transfer the



Two cobras rise from wicker prison and clay jail.

bike and keep the money. By the time my companion arrived and we extricated ourselves, over a hundred eyes watched, four crossed.

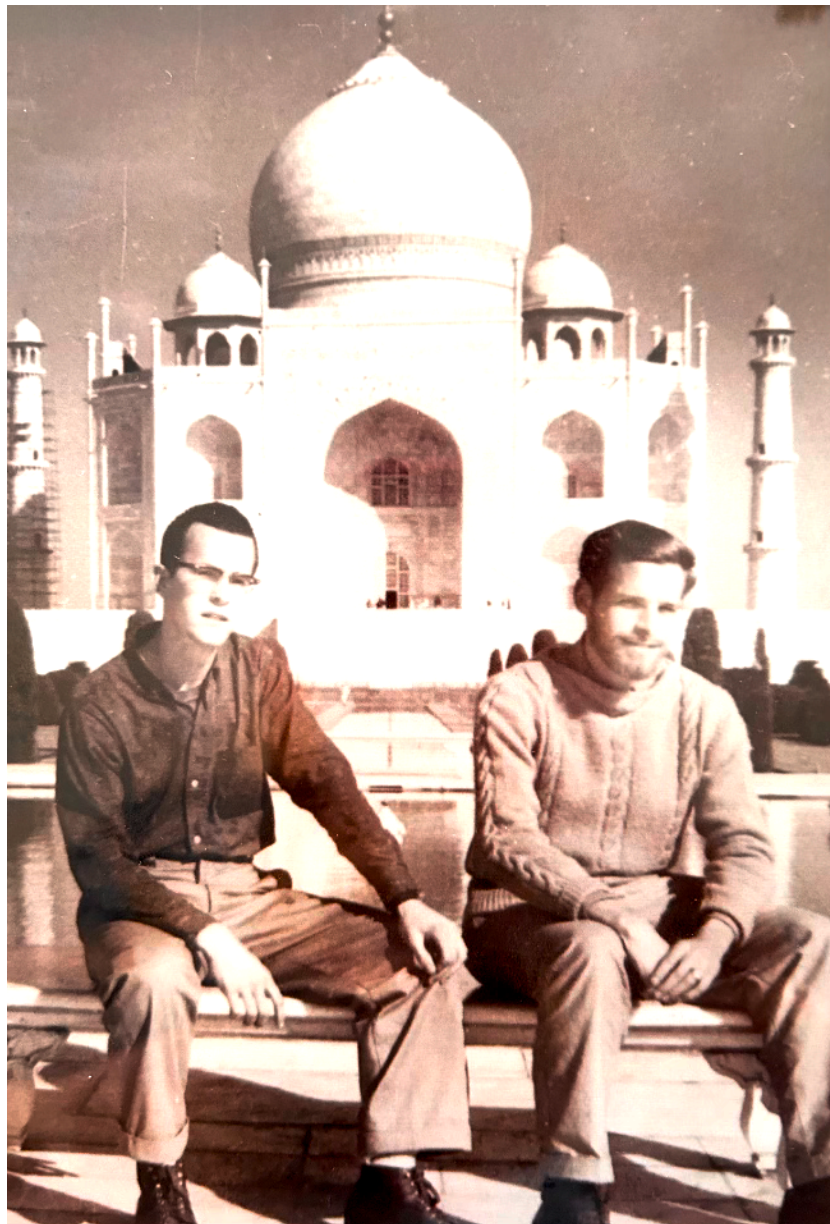
On the bus trip back to Lahore, we were saddened to leave Sialkot but cheered by a high rate of jokes-per-mile. The flying infestation continued as the windshield wipers did a sloppy job of separating wings, thorax, and head. Our driver and his buddy played a game of overtaking each other until one passenger stood halfway in the aisle and blurted out *Safet-ty first!* Although delivered to the city intact, Tom and I had a falling-out the next morning, when my occasional challenge with sleep collided with Wanderbust. I recovered thanks to a tub-bath and a four-hour bed graciously provided by a daughter of the Fosters'. After a reunion on the platform near the evening train to India, we signed a treaty and rolled across a hazardous line that divided Punjab from Punjab.

On the Indian side we took a bicycle rickshaw to the famous Sikh Golden Temple. The streets shimmered with light reflected on the rainwater; streaming along the narrow streets were bicycles, pedaled rickshaws, and pedestrians. This was the start of a tour on the theme of *Earthly Materials*.

Gold=Religion: The Sikh temple in Amritsar rose from a reflecting pool where I removed my shoes and stockings to wade. (About this time I began rotating each sock to migrate the heel-hole to the toes.)

Brick=War: The massive Red Fort was now occupied by monkeys that scampered about with little appreciation for the Mughals of the 1600s.

Marble=Love: The Taj Mahal, built in memory of a favorite wife.



In Agra the second-class waiting room of the railway became our hotel. We had just climbed into our bags when Tom spied a “large mouse” prowling around. The next morning he reported a night-time encounter: “I don’t mind rats that run, but when they stare at you....” “I laughed & laughed but found holes in the pockets of my jacket and pants. As an extreme mammalian contrast, in New Delhi, elephants lent regalia-clad gravitas to the Republic Day parade on January 26. Challenges with rain, illiquidity of checks, logistics, and lodging.

We once again clung to train-steps, only a leg-length above roaring rails. Sunshine now smiled down on us as if we were nearing Ceylon. Fields seemed incongruously placid as they extended spacious and green beyond the racket-&-blur, sprinkled by villages and dotted with water buffaloes. We tacitly gave up the banana-eating contest after 110 between us and switched to a sun-tan duel. Tom remembers that in one city the cool carrot juice was the best drink he’d ever had—“But the sugar cane was less like eating than gnawing on a tree branch.”

Very different travelers sometimes streamed through our car: refugees from Tibet. Why I did not understand. Belongings and children strapped to adults, they had somewhat dark skin tinged with orange. Crowding the aisle, they looked troubled yet somehow robust. Like the two of us they had been driven from home, but not in a Chevrolet.

In Lucknow, Tom was about to brush a piece of dirt off his palm when it crawled over to his thumb. We poked around a dusty outdoor market where I bought a copy of *Camille*, by Dumas. Its tubercular heroine decorated a boudoir that became a refuge for my imagination, disturbed only by coughing. I cashed in my final American Express check, and my last pair of American socks died. I remained in the hotel room to punish the management for not waking us up in time to catch a train. Then in the Railway Retiring Room of Kanpur, I turned over my pillow to discover a cache of 113 rupees (27 dollars), a sum that I wired to the owner, who returned a note of gratitude.

In Benares a troupe of gypsies danced for cash—hardened, skilled, and dutifully jingling with decorations. One night we took a path along the river, where above us towered temples and pilgrim shelters, grotesquely silhouetted; below us cement steps, or *ghats*, descended for pilgrims to immerse themselves in the Ganges. Against the hubbub of the city we could make out the grand curve of the water by lights that crowded to its edge. Occasionally a train would rumble like a bad omen across a faraway iron bridge; many of span and double of deck, it carried both a highway and railroad.

“I wonder what these big fires are for,” said Tom. We watched a man poke one of the half-dozen blazes with a long stick. “They’re not for heat,” he mused. “They’re not for fuel.” “Look at these!” I exclaimed, pointing to two stretchers that dipped into the river and held silk-wrapped bodies. “This is a crematorium,” returned my partner solemnly. As we walked, abashed, through the narrow city passageways, we were almost run down by four chanting stretcher-carriers. Living mummies helped to fill the three-level racks of our departing train, which now trundled across the very bridge that spanned the sacredly germy river of moribund pilgrims.

For us, however, Doomsday had failed to arrive despite predictions. Ashtagraha, the conjunction of eight planets, had held the area in its grip for a month.



Author's souvenir: Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 4, 1962.

A day or so later, I sat on a lengthwise bench amid a crowd of yet-breathing passengers. When a spider crawled near my neck and I reached up to smash it, a passenger gently restrained my wrist, and in a grating cadence said: “That is one of the things that Gandhi taught us.” (My thought: “Teach ‘im, Spidey!”)

At Calcutta, rails and ties ran out of Southeast. In the teeming streets an occasional child sought charity because of his distended scrotum, a parental investment. When we hired a bicycle rickshaw, I felt embarrassed to have some fellow bend over and pump for a stock boy.

Cows wandered among trams, victims of their own holiness:

We had reached Longitude 88 E, where one more booted step would transform Going to Coming.



Streetcar, streetcow.

Scripture 21

Property III, Proprioception: "We Have Hefted the Plates"

And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes...the plates and the engravings thereon.... [W]e have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that he said [Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator] has got the plates of which we have spoken.

Testimony of three witnesses, then eight, *The Book of Mormon* (1830).



Katie Wells flies over the Waccamaw River at the Daves.
Horry County, SC. Credit Stéphane Benner.

Lifting a golden tablet. Poking a friend. Raising buffalo milk in a glass or squeezing it condensed from a tube. Shoving the gearshift of a van. Lifting a dog into a trunk or a child onto a shoulder. Raising the window of a train or lowering a bottle from one. Pushing a recalcitrant bus or the button of an elevator or Grundig. Pulling a red wagon. Rotating a Crayola or jabbing at words on a scrap. Running through a backyard or tossing a candy bar into one. Racing to a taxicab with a backpack in hand or sprinting across the street with an extension ladder. Breaking a window with a drinking glass or garbage can, or balancing against a subway trash can. Sensing glass as it gives way underfoot. Feeling unmoored at a fall. Pedaling a bicycle through a cyclone. Holding out a collection plate or an apple. Yanking a pod from a tree or dropping a journal into a sewer. Trudging through snow or gauging its density. Hand-weighing a bird's egg or a copy of *World-Famous Paintings*. Ascending a tower by scared feet or by pulling orange filaments.

To execute and monitor such actions, vertebrates depend on a neural network called Proprioception. Based on the Latin *proprio*—‘one's own’, ‘individual’—it names the ultimate form of personal property. In fact the beneficiary is both landlord and tenant.

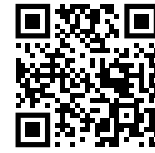
Somatic self-awareness relies on signals from within the body rather than from directly outside it—as from sight, sound, smell, hearing and touch. Deemed “under-appreciated” by one authority, it is usually taken for granted unless compromised by fatigue, drugs, injury, or disease. **(1)** The term overlaps with *kinesthesia*, the perception of movement during motor activity, and has become synonymous with it. But proprioception operates even in the absence of movement, as when someone stands in line, kneels in prayer, stares out a window, or holds a book. According to R.A. Schmidt and C.A. Wrisberg, proprioception allows human beings to monitor “the positions of the joints, the forces produced in the muscles and the orientation of the body in space.” **(2)** This internal GPS gives feedback about what S. Coren and L. Ward term “our continual battle against gravity,” as well as the “tension, compression, or twisting forces on the muscles, tendons, or joints of limbs.” **(3)** Territorial integrity.

How does this sixth sense work? Specialized nerves cooperate with those in the skin and in layers of tissue beneath it that can detect pressure. They relay information to the cortex and cerebellum by way of the spinal cord.

Golgi tendon organs, another set, detect the forces produced in a muscle when it contracts—i.e., the degree of resistance it encounters.

Vestibular apparatus: receptors of the inner ear monitor balance. **(4)**

Muscle spindles make up one group. These narrow tubes with tapered ends, embedded in the fibers of a muscle, register its changing length—i.e., position. These accomplish their work neurologically via the supramarginal gyrus (medicalxpress.com/news/2025-08-alphabet-actions-human-brain.html).



Video: A woman drying dishes reveals several kinds of proprioception.

Creator: Randall Wells, June 2025.

Direct Link: youtube.com/shorts/M5baUz9TsH4

Like a "genre" painting of the 1600's, the middle ground of this video-clip portrays an unknown woman doing a simple task. But as she polishes, the video reveals several kinds of proprioception. (1) Grasping the plate with the left hand, the cloth with the right. (2) Circling the plate clockwise with the cloth—rim and then center, with a reversal or two. (3) Pressing the cloth with the optimal degree of force. (4) Tipping the plate upside down while slightly adjusting her grip once it's turned. (5) Standing while tilting her head. Video by author.



Video: Two men enlist proprioception to carry a bedstead.

Creator: Randall Wells, June 2025.

Direct Link: youtube.com/shorts/7AUTRjDGBMc

God helps those who help themselves, in this case, two men who enlist proprioception to carry a bedstead. They rely on vestibular apparatus to stay erect or lean strategically, muscle spindles to register position, and Golgi tendon organs to monitor resistance. The movers can not-only stand, but grasp, lift, and ambulate—forward, backward, and turn-ward. They can also shorten their gait-to-weight ratio and maintain a uniform pace. By permission Ahmad Broughton and Anthony Carter. July 31, 2025. Video by author.

A gym-goer can produce a certain degree of resistance by inserting a popper-pin in the stack of 10-pound plates. A weight-watcher can stand on the bathroom scale to quantify the body's opposition to gravity. But humans (as well as other vertebrates) must monitor position and resistance internally so as to perform any motor skill. For example a batter values the "sweet spot" where the ball meets the fullest opposition to the swing and thus rebounds with most force.

Someone in Floyd County, VA, returned from a trip to receive no welcome from proprioception: *Fog hides what fire left. / Traveling key presses no lock: / His suitcase now house.*

A touch of multiple sclerosis left a friend of the Wellses' unable to direct his foot or sense its position. "My WalkAide," reported Bob Matthews, "lifts my toe (so I do not stumble) and turns out my foot (so my base is wider) for stability. The computer of the device times the assistance to coincide with the lifting of my legs as I begin a step."

The traditional paradigm of the Five Senses ignores proprioception. Yet that worn-out doctrine will probably be handed down to children like the story of Washington and the cherry tree, an apocryphal chop that would have required signals from the muscles, joints, tendons, and tissues as to shape, weight, position, angle, force, and speed—plus those from the inner ear that help the axe-wielder keep upright.

Proprioceptive skill varies with age and practice. Once while children frolicked on a porch that was low but un-railed, I watched them out of the corner of my eye. As a child teetered on the edge, I lunged while reaching out my palm, cupped it under falling hair, and let his head become slowly heavier until it rested just above the brick walk.

In the following photo, the child must lean forward at about a 45-degree angle; support his torso with both arms while keeping his balance both front-to-back and side-to-side; grasp the axle with both hands, arms outstretched; and push forward with alternating legs in a pace steady enough to help keep from falling if the wheel stops or speeds up—all the while keeping his head fairly level with the floor.

Proprioception often cooperates with the sense of touch—i.e., the skin's ability to monitor surfaces. But these signals of texture reach the brain from cutaneous nerves rather than from underlying ones. The grasping faculty very often works along with the eyes. "Look, feel it!" says Marge as she hands me a pail of blueberries. Sometimes it *corrects* for sight. The apparently empty carton dips under one unseen egg; the about-to-be-crumpled bag signals a mystery weight (perhaps a miniature Kit Kat); a runty loaf of wheat bread surprises the hand and arm with its denseness; a heavy glass beer mug almost reaches the forehead before Golgi-and-spindle correct for lightweight plastic.



Courtesy
Robert W. Matthews.



Sam rolls over shadow-ties upon a
flanged wooden wheel
first "turned" by woodturner
Dennis Ross, M.D., Ph.D.

Tom's memory of a too-late correction:

"The boat was a 21-foot home-built with oak ribs and a sheet-metal hull. The cabin was plywood with holes for light, no glass or other rain-proofing attempted. I was 10 or 11 years old and the boat was tied up next to the Columbia Yacht Club in Chicago.

"The hull had a 4- or 5-inch-wide place to walk (the 'catwalk' in nautical terms) around the edge of the 'house.' On top of this cabin we had a grab-rail, somewhat like the ski-rack on a car. This 1-inch dowel-rod had an inverted-V-shaped piece of bronze at each end that we were in the process of screwing to the top of the house. In need of an item on the bow, I walked jauntily along the catwalk, balancing myself, of course, by holding onto the hand-rail—which wasn't yet attached, so both it and I went dunking in the Chicago River & Sanitary Canal."



Several weeks later Tom, his older brother David, and their friend Herb Wulff ply the Illinois River at Pekin.
(5)

Proprioception can not only correct for vision but *substitute* for it, as when hoisting an opaque teapot to estimate its water level. Even experts can misjudge weight. A pair of mail clerks took turns lifting an envelope: "Three," said one, "Four" said the other, but "Two ounces" decreed the scale. Jack Benny demonstrated a talent for weight-discrimination during a television show. His pants were hanging on a rack, and after his valet took a coin out of the pocket to tip a delivery man, Jack returned, lifted his trousers, and asked who'd taken out the quarter. (6)

Later the children themselves would report on the phenomenon. Andrea on her Halloween loot: "Want to see how heavy my bag is?" Katie on an envelope that held profits from Girl Scout cookies: "Gol, feel how heavy this money thing is!"

It was the mysterious sense of our own babies' weight that provoked the author's curiosity. In 1976, as I carried newborn Andrea, bobbing and patting her, she screeched *Colic!* with wide-open gums. When at last she fell asleep against my shoulder, I treasured the weight of her head and body, indignant that such a burden could be measured by the pound. And happy to learn about proprioception from my colleague.

Even fictional characters have this ability. Robinson Crusoe took an iron crowbar and made his way into the body of the shipwreck, where he "felt several casks, and loosened them with the crow, but could not break them up." He also felt a roll of lead, "and could stir it, but it was too heavy to remove" (1719). From a novel by Richard O. Collin: "The Adviser's body is leaden because his personal biological clock is still synchronized with Greenwich and the Prime Meridian." (7) Even in a scene painted by Giotto as imagined in a poem: "the solid heft/and

weight of angels' wings to brush the ground.” (8) As a metaphor, proprioception can be found in Proverbs 27:3: “A stone is heavy, and sand weighty; but the anger of a fool is weightier than them both.”

Not only vision but hearing can complement this system, as when Katie determined whether or not a box contained its audiotape by shaking and holding it to her ear. Of course proprioception is vital for playing a musical instrument. To a guitar-strummer like the author, the violin's No Fret is a Threat. To his friend Heather Blake Wolsieffer, evoking music from the violin combines playing by braille and listening intensively.

After countless hours of practice, our muscles are in fact trained to remember where our fingers go on the violin. However, even with a lifetime of practice I think any violinist would agree with me that intonation is the doom of all violinists as anyone can play something out of tune but the real challenge is playing in tune. What sets the violin apart from its siblings the viola, cello, and bass, is how small the instrument itself is. If you are to slightly move your finger on a double bass, the pitch change is practically inaudible. However, if you even make the slightest twitch with your finger on the violin you will hear a total half step difference in the pitch. Not to mention that the distance between notes gets higher as you go up the fingerboard—for example, the distance between Bb and B natural in first position is completely different from the distance between Bb and B natural in 4th position.

(By email, 2024.)

And the piano? Not to be outdone by this young musician, the author offers a proprioceptive challenge to the reader: playing diminished thirds. (9)

One day in fourth grade Tommy Hollinger presented a gift to the teacher, a bouquet of six red roses. Manufactured at “The Shop,” his dad's small factory, it was preserved in water and enclosed in a glass globe about eight inches in diameter. A vitreous polished apple, it was also a reminder that my own father's job produced only a slide rule and catalogue. Worst of all, the sphere was what I'd now call a secular reliquary, its petals saturated with color and ever-unfaded, ever-undrowned. So when the teacher stepped out of the room, up went its square base to the top of Randy's head—a crown that he prance-balanced before his alarmed and giggling schoolmates. A sudden absence of weight, a smash of unwanted liberation! We gazed down open-mouthed at the pool of stem-petal-shards.

Decades after becoming deposited in the classroom, Randall introduced Katie's elementary school peers to the idea of sensory resistance. First they described an apple in writing: not only its shape, colors, smell, taste, weight, and sound-when-chomped, but its opposition when squeezed, bitten, or lifted. Before the next day's session they performed an activity or skill and recorded any feeling of resistance it produced. One student's report:

We played Mircey [Mercy], pushing, pulling, gravity, played hand game, and turned around pulling each others arms in a circle, arm wrestling, hand holding, lifting leg with great force, lifting up me. When we were playing hand games, we forced our hands together, jumping.



A lad balances two loaves at the same time he waves in Skopje, Yugoslavia, November 1961.

Another child noted that while drawing with a pencil, you have to bear down harder in some places to make them darker. Another fellow warned about applying too much pressure when cutting wood with a “bansaw”: you push, pull, or twist slowly so the blade won’t break and cut off your fingers. Another student applied makeup to Jennifer— squeezing the sponge to apply the foundation, even pulling her face just enough to make the eye-shadow light. Allison baked cookies: “I felt resistance when I stirred with the mixer. I had to keep it in the bowl. When I cracked the eggs I had to be careful to get it in the bowl. I had to reach for the bowl. The eggs were light, but I couldn’t hit them very hard or they would break everywhere.” (10)

Types of breakfast cereal: *snap*, *crackle*, and *pop* appeal to the ears—but *crunch* to the sense of resistance. A communion wafer? The eyes report its round, white thinness; the tongue detects its smooth texture and helps the nose register its bland taste; the ear notes the ritual crack as the officiant breaks it. But only the specialized nerves of the fingers and hand can appreciate its essential, quasi-mystical quality of near-weightlessness, which hovers between the earthly and the ethereal, Necco, true angel-food.

Consider the spud. To lift it a cook must sense how much effort the fingers, hand, and arm need to expend. To peel it, one hand must do the turning while the other shoves a blade against the skin at just the right speed and angle; to test it for doneness, fingers pinch it; the teeth chew it by sending feedback to the periodontal ligament as to how much force must be exerted.

The residual ability to grind this vegetable saved the life of one person. In February, 1945, Ernest Lion had spent days riding in an open coal car while forced to travel from Auschwitz on his second journey to Buchenwald. The starving person's *al dente*:

Once I passed out from hunger and clearly felt myself falling into a deep sleep, more severe than I have ever experienced since. I remember vividly how I slipped peacefully and without pain into a coma.... Then someone stuck a raw potato into my mouth. I chewed some of it and its juices slowly revived me. It took a long time to regain total consciousness. (11)



Randy balances on branch. "I could only hold my breath": author's father.



Author's granddaughter prevents the house from collapsing inward.

What events of your own, good or bad, routine or dramatic, are memorable for enlisting spindles & Golgis? Here are some of Randy/Randall's:

- * The reel-type lawn mower, a Briggs & Stratton, apportioned half its weight to me and half to my mother, who had driven across town so I wouldn't have to push the machine home. I felt a twinge of guilt as her hands and wrists strained to lift it by handle-and-wheel into the back of the station wagon.
- * As a crouching catcher in Little League—every game for four years—I was usually able to snag the ball in the pocket of the heavy glove, whether a strike or a tip, even when the bat whirled near my face.

- * Marching along the entire parade route, I held the American flag at an Iwo Jima angle as my torso and legs supported the bottom of the pole, which I felt sinking heavily into a pouch attached to a wide belt.
- * When I carried the shiny brass cross at the head of a robed procession, it was surprisingly heavy—“Almost like a weapon,” I mused.
- * The iconic water tower rose high-legged across from the elementary school. One evening a chain-link fence around it, topped by some half-hearted barbed wire, demanded that a practiced tree-climber, maybe a freshman in high school, conquer it. Wiry myself, I clambered up the fence, somehow negotiated the twisting roll of incisors, and dropped to the other side. I began to mount the ladder by pushing by legs, pulling by arms, and leaning by torso. Confident, excited, maybe a touch liberated, up I hoisted myself. But as the two-story house next door gradually sank, I began to feel uneasy. When I found myself peering down upon its dark, shingled roof, I came to a halt. Tilting my head slowly backward, I took in the view of the ladder above, its remaining two-thirds narrowing and finally disappearing at the great silver belly. My hands now moistened the rung. One slip—how quickly I could reach the ground—rhymes with *found*. “Anything for a belt with a hook!” If only the impounded water was a lake! No trunk to embrace, no second-chance limb to grab. Could I resume my descent and not become a collapsed marionette? I began edging toward the lower rung and felt it support my weight, foot to ankle to knee. Could I sense the next one? Please, no dizziness! One more footing accomplished, then another, and at last I jumped off and felt my joints both opposed and welcomed. *Safe!*
- * Four arms and four sprinting legs shared the weight of a horizontal extension-ladder as it bounced in our arms. When my father and I reached the smoke-filled house, we hoisted the rungs hand-over-hand until they were nearly vertical, then tilted them onto the inclined roof of the front porch.
- * The Wells family would provide a kind of battery for the grandfather’s clock by pulling one of the two sash-weights down with a cranking noise. At bedtime we would gently restrain the edge of the pendulum to prevent its gongs, twenty-eight at midnight.
- * At the A & P, while working overnight to “Music ’Til Dawn,” sponsored by American Airlines, I once felt the need to play hide & seek with my buddy. Intending to cover myself with an empty box or two, I trespassed the raised office, climbed over the glass partition, dropped onto the pile of boxes—and continued to sink! Near the bottom I became invisible for half an hour despite the “beeps” I would make as teasing hints.
- * As we novice shipmates walked around Halifax after rough seas, why did the sidewalks roll, the bridges rock, and the stairs rise up and down, making us almost land-sick?
- * How to mount a heavy backpack:
 1. Set it down with straps facing you.
 2. Grab left strap with left hand.
 3. With right hand, begin lifting pack after grasping same handle.
 4. Lift and swing pack toward right shoulder while hunching a bit and inserting right arm into strap.

5. Attach to shoulder while removing right hand from underneath.
 6. Hold strap again with right hand. Leaning over, reach behind at waist height and grasp other strap with left hand.
 7. Spread it far enough to insert left arm.
 8. With right hand, lift pack a bit from shoulder to give it some play.
 9. Hunch upward to shift weight toward the left evenly.
 10. With left hand, raise strap to shoulder.
 11. Hunch again to help arms lift pack with both hands in straps.
 12. Regain balance.
 13. Legs firmly planted, hunch to help lower the pack to carrying position.
- * On the platform of the Illinois Central Railroad, in Champaign, Illinois, I grasped the handle of a woman's suitcase and found myself tugging an anvil. ("It's full of books.") After a free ride to the boarding house, I occupied a stretcher to the hospital.
 - * Dare our children and I cross the Pont against an invisible current far above the River Gard? I judged the risk a trade-off for adventure and invited them to go along. Holding hands at times, we leaned against the Mistral, proceeding in irregular tacks along the ancient aqueduct, skirting the rectangles that opened to the second level below, testing our grip and balance at every step, sometimes crawling. Safely on the other side we stood up and proudly waved at Mom.
 - * Kicking for lap after lap, down and up the Coastal Carolina University pool, I would raise one arm, cock it behind my head, then plunge the hand down and backward in line with my shoulders, rather than close to my waist—the path of most resistance—while simultaneously raising the other hand. I would make two raise-and-scoops before turning my head on the third for a breath (a pattern learned from Tom's daughter). One day I pulled myself up the metal steps with dripping arms and legs, carefully maintained my balance across the wet tiles, and penciled an X in a square to mark my two-hundredth half-mile.
 - * The birthday gift was heavy for its modest six-inch length. I handed it to Tom, who unwrapped what else but a souvenir of the cross-Canada railway trip we'd taken with spouses and friends: a rusty spike.



The sense of resistance is often expressed figuratively, sometimes by hinting at the original metaphors—*poise*, *gravitas*, and *gravid*—sometimes by retaining a faded image:

Put your shoulder to the wheel; stand on the shoulders of those before; shrug it off; get government off our backs; take a load off; bend an elbow or knee, elbow your way in; leave someone hanging or twisting in the wind; give someone a lift or lift someone up (perhaps to God); reach out to, lean on, fall for, strong arm, yank around, or bend over backwards for someone; bend a rule; drop the ball or get it rolling; dig in your heels; twist the knife; roll with the punches; pull your punches or your weight; have pull, or pull someone's chain, push someone's button, when push comes to shove; don't mean to pry; weigh an idea, toss it out, catch it, or kick it around; jump at the chance or be jumpy; touch bases; get wound up or wind down; bite the bullet; be light-headed, light-fingered, light-hearted, heavy-hearted; or

lead-footed; put your best foot forward, foot the bill, put someone on the back foot; catch someone off balance, words worth their weight in gold.

In John Bunyan's allegory, the protagonist, Christian learns that his city will be burned by heavenly fire, so he fears that he will be undone by "a burden that lieth hard upon me" (i.e., his iniquities, according to Psalms 38:4). "What shall I do to be saved?" he asks frantically. His dear wife and children initially fear for him, then tolerate him, and ultimately mock his strange distemper. But they end up entreating him to return as he runs away in search of eternal life, warned by the Evangelist to fly the oncoming Judgment.

His bundle almost sinks him into the Slough of Despond (as the weight of his sins causes despair). He learns, however, that he should be content to bear this load until he comes to a place of deliverance. He struggles up a hill to a cross, where his burden is loosed from his shoulders, falls off his back, and tumbles into a sepulcher, causing him to feel "glad and lightsome." (The sins of the long-struggling Christian have been expiated by the sacrificial death of Jesus.) After crossing the river of death, he finally reaches Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, a shining city of winged harpers and gold-paved streets. So Bunyan enlists what else but proprioception, the most earth-bonding of senses, to help believers make their way safely through this world to the next.

NOTES

1. Joan Piroch, Professor of Psychology, Coastal Carolina College, 1977.
2. *Motor Learning and Performance*, 2nd ed. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2000, p. 91.
3. *Sensation and Perception*, 3rd ed. San Diego: Harcourt, 1984, p. 259.
4. K.G. Pearson, "Proprioceptive Sensory Feedback." *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences* Vol.15, pp. 263-64.
5. Tom: "This photo shows how narrow the catwalk was to get from the aft cabin up to the bow. The handrail is probably the little lump on the top starboard side, with a small line hanging down in front of the square cutout that served as a window. A bandage covers my burned foot." (By email 2023.) This boat had been reconstructed on the backyard of the iconic 646 Kenilworth in 1954, the year that Randy raced past the house with "Whose Dog?"
6. George Burns, with David Fisher. *All My Best Friends*. New York: Putnam, 1989, p. 279. For examples from literature, see R. Wells, "'The Jar Went Heavy in my Hand': How the Written Word Captures Proprioception." *Bridges Online Journal*, Winter 2008, Coastal Carolina University: coastal.edu/bridges/winter2008
7. *The Man with Many Names*. New York: St. Martin's, 1995, pp. 26-27. Richard was the author's cherished colleague and friend.
8. Morri Creech, *Blue Rooms*. Waywiser, 2018, p. 35.

9. First, set your right hand on a table, palm down. (A) Raise thumb and middle finger, lower both. (B) Raise index finger and ring finger, lower both. (C) Raise middle finger and little finger, lower both. Now go back and forth with these three digital pairs. Now with the left hand repeat the sequence (A), (B), (C), which will go in the opposite direction. Now shuttle back and forth with these three pairs. Now with both hands play the series (A) (B) (C) together, again in opposite directions. Now play a series in the same direction, so that the left hand starts with the pinky & middle finger, the right hand with the thumb & middle finger (both hands will hit index & ring fingers at the same time).

Give those *muscle spindles* a further workout as to position by varying your speed (tempo). Give those *Golgi tendon organs* a job by varying your force (dynamics). Now play staccato with one hand, legato with the other, or why not at different speeds? And why not with crossed hands? Whatever the variations, be sure to play each trio up and down all twelve chromatic scales.

10. Michelle L. Schroder (Mercy) and Allison Canady Daly (cookies). By permission.

11. *The Fountain at the Crossroad*, p. 38.



The exact design originally appeared as a highly celebrated 19th-century illustration by the English artists George Woolliscroft Rhead, Frederick Rhead, and Louis Rhead. It was prominently showcased in the famous 1898 Century Company Edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New York). Google Gemini.

Scripture 22

D & M VI: The Number 7

At the roll of authorial dice, what should come to rest upright but a 3 and a 4. Another roll turns up 5 dots and 2. Another: 6 and 1. The subject of this chapter has been determined.

Like every number, seven is a conception. It's like the ur-redwood that shades Plato's yard. Although it can be a "real" number, in math, it is always neural. You might take this digit in a bakery line, but you cannot drop it in a bag with doughnuts. Seven-ness is even cultural. The Pirahã of the Brazilian rainforest "do not have words for precise numbers, but rather concepts for a small or larger amount." (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirah%C3%A3_people#Culture, accessed March 26, 2024).

This conception has an engaging structure. It alternates three even numbers with four *odd*, and starts and ends with an odd. Wait—there's more than one order. ("Can't you read that?!") How many permutations would its integers be capable of? Sid: "I think it would just be 7!" With the exclamation mark, this formula means: $7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 5,040$. As a constant, 7 quickly illustrates so many phenomena that St. Thomas would drop his feather.

Question . Whether a single integer hint at the vastness of the phantasmagoria.

Why not begin with a seven-line lyric, "The Inn at Doboz":

When I go, when I go,
When I go into the inn at Doboz,
I shall sit on the, sit on the,
Sit on the bench of cherry wood.
Hostess, I ask you, come out at once,
This trifling debt of mine,
On account of my wine, I wish to settle.

Bela Bartok, p. xi. (1)

In Sumerian religion, a seven-headed serpent was slain by the god Ninurta (AI). "My legs are hairy for a good reason," replied Charlotte the spider to Wilbur the pig. "Furthermore, each leg of mine has seven sections: the coxa, the trochanter, the femur, the patella, the tibia, the metatarsus, and the tarsus." (2) Same number as the steps of the Icelandic tourist experience: skylagoon.com. And as the siblings of the Weber family: Senta, Ruth, Gertrude, Reneé, Judith, Ginger, and (brother) Alfons. (Movie *UnBroken*, directed by Beth Lane, 2025.)

Traditionally there are seven parts of speech. There are that many signs that it's time to buy a new printer. Seven ways by which God speaks, according to Mark Batterson, pastor and author: scripture, desires, doors, dreams, people, promptings, and pain. Seven American brand names for Tramadol: ConZip, FusePaq, Synapryn, Qdolo, Rybix, ODT, Ryzolt, Ultram ER. (mayoclinic.org/drugs-supplements/tramadol-oral-route/description/drg-20068050, accessed Feb. 27, 2025.)

Members of the G-7 are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Seventh holy founder of the Servite order was Benedicta dell' Antella. For “74 Songs in 7/4 Time” (i.e., seven beats per measure), you might go to David Bennett on YouTube.



This chit prevents horde-boarding.



Same number prohibits unseemly dumping. .

God rested on the seventh day of creation. The conventional seven days of the week add to the number's mystery by returning again and again. More confusion: September means “seventh” in Latin but it's the ninth month. Even weirder is this tale recounted by Fred First:

I was making conversation with a grizzled grampa who was working on my car. I mentioned that I had passed a large snapping turtle down the road just before I got to his shop. He commenced telling me about how you can eat a turtle. I was curious what the meat was like. After explaining with great care that there were seven kinds of meat in the species, he peered up into the shade tree overhead as if to retrieve the memory of the last turtle he had enjoyed on the half shell. He named off the list: "There's beef and pork; veal and turkey"; and after a brief pause to be sure he'd included them all, “Chicken, shrimp and rabbit!” I was puzzled: “And there was turtle, right?”

“No they ain't no turtle in there at all.”

The Black Kow that Randall spread on his clover-grove contained no beef, but instead: wheat straw, dolomite, fibrous peat, gypsum, crushed feathers, cottonseed meal, and peanut meal.

The following odds & evens characterize theology, politics, geology, paleo-archaeology, astrology, interspecies relations, physics, poetry, literature, music, architecture, games, cuisine, finance, crafts, codes, care of the body, and the effects of war.

Sacred contexts:

- * “Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” (Genesis.).
- * The seven Biblical angels.
- * A prayer of seven verses begins the Qur’ān and serves as a key to it.
- * According to another verse, the bounty of Allāh is like a kernel of corn that grows seven ears, each of them bearing a hundred kernels (Sūrah 2, verse 262).
- * The Seventh Caliph was possibly the most eminent.
- * The Seventh Heaven is a concept shared by several religions. **(3)**

- * Seven mountains: Book of Revelation asserts that the Whore of Babylon sits on them—traditionally understood as the hills of Rome. (Cincinnati, the City of Seven Hills, cannot agree on which ones.)
- * The Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Heavenly Virtues.
- * The Seven "Ones" of Paul: One body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One faith, One baptism, and one God.
- * The Seven Stations of the Cross.
- * The Seven Last Words of Jesus—i.e., the last utterances.
- * The injunction by Jesus to forgive someone who has sinned against you—not just five or eight, but seven times in one day (Luke 17:4).
- * The seven appearances of Jesus after his murder.
- * The Seven Seals in Revelation as well as this vision in 5:6:

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

As for St. James, he operated an infirmary along with a conveniently-nearby cemetery:

Sixteen coal-black horses
 Hitched to a rubber-tired hack
 Seven girls goin' to the graveyard
 And only six of 'em comin' back.

The Jewish Sabbath occurs on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church are Baptism, Confirmation, The Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders. Numbers (19:4) describes a purification ritual in which the priest sprinkles the blood of a red heifer seven times. The most prominent ritual objects in Judaism may be the yod, shofar, skullcap, tallit, tefillin, menorah, and spice box. (Display, Jewish Community Center, Charlotte, NC, February 2024).

Objectively tallied sevens:

- * The tetrarchy of Anglo-Saxon England comprised Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Wessex.
- * There are seven field offices for the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, as many voting districts in Pontiac, Michigan, and as many provinces of Costa Rica.
- * You might count the syllables of the name Folliott Sandford Pierpoint.
- * Time zones? Officially, the GMT + 7 adds seven hours to Greenwich Mean Time and includes Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam.
- * The noble gases, which make up Group 18 (XVIII) of the periodic table: helium, neon, argon, krypton, xenon, radon, and oganesson. ([britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com), accessed Feb. 2022.)
- * Seven pure elements form diatomic molecules.
- * Types of feathers: wing, down, tail, contour, semiplume, bristle, and filoplume (ymcacharlotte.org/branches/dowd, accessed Nov. 2021).
- * The average time needed for growing a marketable Christmas tree is seven years, according to the National Christmas Tree Association (almanac.com, accessed 17 May 2023).

Please circle **True** or **False**:

A novel published by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1851 is *The House with the Six Gables*.

And please circle the lone word of eight syllables among these seven sevens:

abastecimiento, *abrenuntiaturus*, *déresponsabiliser*, *indispensability*, *Jayawardanapura*, *nebeneinanderstellen*, and *paleoarchaeology*.*

These types of Mexican *mole* both define and “participate” the sauce: *poblano*, *negro*, *coloradito*, *amarillo*, *manchamantel*, *chichilo*, *verde* (elpasomexicanrestaurants.com what-is-mole-sauce, accessed June 2022).

Whole grain bread sold by Food for Life includes barley, brown rice, corn, millet, rye, and wheat. The seven common wrinkles of the face are frown lines, lip lines, tear troughs, bunny lines, nasolabial folds, marionette lines, and neck lines. (4). In one version of the song “Oh Shenandoah,” “‘Tis seven years since last I’ve seen you,/Away you rolling river.”

The number can be iconic, often appearing in Greek legends (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niobe, accessed Aug. 2022). And traditional, such as the constellation Pleiades, “Seven Sisters,” or the Seven Seas, a name for varying bodies of water over thousands of years (oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/sevenseas.html, accessed 2022).

The traditional seven continents actually comprised only six, for you can walk from Europe to Asia and back. But this group reclaimed seven-ness with the discovery of Greater Adria, an expanse that had broken off from an earlier land-mass and now extends underground and on the surface between Spain and Iran.

Please circle the item that does not help to comprise the chakras (alphabetical): *Balasana*, *Crown*, *Heart*, *Root*, *Sacral*, *Solar Plexus*, *Third Eye*, *Throat*.**

Any number can originate subjectively but function objectively—such as 7 *No-trump* in the game of bridge. And the rules of 7-card stud and Scrabble, the latter with its seven letter-tiles for each player. The general emergency signal of ships: seven or more short blasts followed by one long one. The protocol used by Hospice for care during the last seven days of life: (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28622481/



Seven white-wheelers in a row.

In 1961 the United States government issued passports identified by seven alphanumerics, the author's being **B436265**.

Titles of advertisements and newspaper articles are no stranger to 7. **(5)**

The number can be arbitrary but official, as Tooth #7 (upper right). It can also be unplanned. In 1992, a vertical dig in Kenya turned up identifiable fragments of these animals: elephants, rhinos, horses, giraffes, pigs, hippos, and antelopes—dominant herbivore taxa from each time sequence. **(6)** You will no doubt recall the author's seven tablets of Mesopotamian clay, precious of heft, unfortunately unwitnessed, by three, then eight.

Seven can be efficacious or superstitious, depending on opinion. According to "Killer Cures: Remembering the old time remedies": "The 7th son in a family can stop bleeding, cure the thrash, and take off warts"; "The 7th daughter of a 7th daughter can blow out a burn." **(7)**

The author, always vigilant on behalf of *Angel*, once spotted the President of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as he boarded a 777F. Next to him sat a handsome, dapper, and muscular fellow with a code name and English accent, who ordered a martini "shaken, not stirred." The preacher relaxed his scruples with a 7 and 7 while watching an American Western.***

Sevens can be arbitrary by artistic choice—for example these women dancing up a rug (photo at right).

The plot of Zelinsky's *Rapunzel* includes six family members plus Mama Wannabe. How many swans a-singing and how many brides for how many brothers? Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber fenced in this musical menagerie: Nachtigall, Cucu, Frosch (frog), Die Henne, Der Hahn (rooster), Die Wachtel (quail), and Die Katz.

The title of the song "Everybody's Singing" forecasts its seven musical quotations:

- "Loretta," by Townes Van Zandt.
- "I'm Over You," by Keith Whitely.
- "New Shoes," by Caleb Klauder.
- "The Moon is High (And So Am I)," by Roger Miller.
- "Train on the Island," traditional.
- "Wagon Wheel," by Old Crow Medicine Show.
- "I'm So Lonesome I could Cry," by Hank Williams.

CD, *Golden Shoals*, 2020. Randall thanks Amy Alvey.



Hooking by Megan McKewan.
Wool strips on a linen background.

The wall photographed below holds drawings by Dale Chihuli arranged in three rows of seven. The doubly odd-numbered arrangement—both vertical and horizontal—offsets the dominant four-sidedness of the frames (as well as the virtual frame itself).



Chihuli Collection, Morean Arts Center, St. Petersburg, Florida.

For some people the traditional itch of seven years contracts to as many months. For marital consolation, there are seven signs that your dog loves you, or seven types of cheese as classified by rind and texture (according to Juliet Harbutt). **(8)** The seven styles of American domestic architecture are distinguished by *Complete Edifices* as Houseboat, Stucco box, Adobe ranch house, Bungalow, Temple, Cabin, & Trailer. **(9)** Dwellings astrological include a conjunction of seven planets in a single house, Graha Kutami. (Accessed Aug. 20, 2022, [en.everybodywiki.com/Graha_Kutami_\(Multiple_Planet_Combination\)_-_Introduction](https://en.everybodywiki.com/Graha_Kutami_(Multiple_Planet_Combination)_-_Introduction).) The seven tenets of The Satanic Temple of Virginia “ultimately boil down to just being a good person.” (Rose Bastet, *Roanoke Times*, 28 Feb. 2023, p. A3.) “If you want to be asked again,” cautions Emily Post, here are seven Do’s and Don’ts. **(10)**

Any country that desires respect from the international community must demonstrate these attributes, according to Michael J. Mazarr, Senior Political Scientist for the Rand Corporation. National ambition and will. Unified national identity. Shared opportunity. An active State. Effective institutions. A learning and adaptive society. Competitive diversity. and Pluralism. **(11)**

Angel would be remiss to ignore the world's penchant for self-destruction. In *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War*, the author identifies “seven spheres of civilian suffering,” which often overlap:

- * Personal violence (killing, wounding, torturing)
- * Sexual atrocities
- * Spatial suffering
- * Impoverishment arising from the first three
- * Famine and disease
- * Emotional suffering
- * Postwar suffering. (12)

Suppose we turn away from the earthly dark matter to human creativity.

Western (European) music is typically *heptatonic*—composed of seven pitches per octave in the scale. The *pentatonic*, by contrast uses only five tones per octave, in a spacing pattern used by the black keys of the piano. Each octave in the seven-scale system includes five whole steps (tones) and two half steps (semitones). Variations in these intervals produce seven modes. The most familiar is the *Ionian*, exemplified by the C-major scale, which allows a person to whistle “Yankee Doodle” and many other doodles. (13)

In poetry, the haiku form makes a seven-sandwich. Its top and bottom lines of five syllables hold a filling of seven:

That childhood earache—
could it leak from memory
to old eustachians?

Another kind of poem, or at least verse, is the “fourteener.” It enlists fourteen accented syllables per stanza:

Peanut sat on a railroad track (four)
Heart was all a-flut-ter. (three)
Five-fifteen came ‘round the bend, (four)
Toot toot peanut butter. (three)

As you can hear, lines two and four rhyme.

Randall's entry:

The actualities of life
Aquinas did ignore.
No Martinique, no flying snake,
So only angels soar.

This traditional form is also called ballad stanza, one that often underlies hymns, where it's known as Common Meter: “*O God, our help in ages past, / Our hope for years to come, / Our shelter from the stormy blast, / And our eternal home*” (Isaac Watts). The fourteener can sound mechanical, even jingly, if it is not varied. Such resources include de-emphasizing a syllable

(*from* in the line above), adding a syllable, or using *near-rhyme*: “Hope is a thing with feathers / That perches in the *soul* / And sings the tune without the words / And never stops at *all*” (Emily Dickinson).

And now, if Advanced AI, particularly Artificial Superintelligence (ASI), doesn’t mimic or fulfill the role of the Antichrist described in Biblical texts, I will tell you about Randall’s misadventure with a Chinese vine.

NOTES

* Paleoarchaeology.

** Balasana.

*** “*The Magnificent Seven* (2016). Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, Robert Vaughn, Brad Dexter, James Coburn, Horst Buchholz, and a former King of Thailand.

1. *Piano Music of Béla Bartók. The Archive Edition, ed. Dr. Benjamin Suchoff. Series II.* New York: Dover, p. xi.

2. E.B. White, “Charlotte’s Web.” New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1952. p. 55.

3. Arabs in the days of Muhammed distinguished these three types of camel: *Bahia*, which had given birth seven times; *wasīlah*, which had given birth to seven females; and *hāmin*, which had fathered seven offspring. (*The Holy Qur’ān: Arabic Text with English Translation & Short Commentary*, ed. Malik. Ghulām Farid. Islam International/Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA, first published 1969: pp. 370-71.) With these details the Qur’ān may have intended to distinguish conventional human notions with divine precepts.

4. Advertisement for Bela Luz, *Kerr County People*, March-April 2022, p. 21.

5. Each of the following begins with **7** or **Seven**:

- * Ways the White House can dodge the debt limit. * Credit card moves to stretch your budget. * Tactics used by scammers. * Factors driving economic development in Virginia.”
- * Tips for preparing financially for a recession. * Top reasons for assisted living. *
- Surprising revelations from Netflix’s *Harry & Meghan*. * Essential facts you need to know about hypotension. * Ways high net worth investors build wealth. * Things to look for in the full January 6 report. * Ways to preserve your memory. * Best iPhone mini-cases. *
- Benefits of flexing muscles. * Ways to prepare for a recession. * Reasons to support the Sierra Club. * Ways bosses show emotional intelligence. * Best stocks to buy and watch. *
- Surprises about the world after being away from work at the NYT. * Signs of a torn meniscus. * Types of thinking. * Beautiful reasons why Aero Willys will be your next car” (1953). * *Habits of Highly Effective People* (Franklin Covey, 1989). * Paint colors for kitchen cabinets. * Pool exercises for fat-burning workouts. * Best places to see wildflowers in California. * Warning signs of dementia (AI): “memory loss, particularly for recent events, difficulty with familiar tasks, language problems, disorientation, impaired judgment, misplacing things, and changes in mood and personality.”

6. Meave Leakey with Samira Leakey. *The Sediments of Time: My Lifelong Search for the Past*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020, p. 100. For this book author thanks Dennis Ross.
7. Rodney Ferrell, *Rogersville* (TN) *Review*: 3-4 June 2023, p. 6A.
8. “Cheese, please.” *Costco Connection*, Dec. 2021, p. 35.
9. Charles W. Moor, Kathryn Smith, and Peter Becker. New York: Rizzoli, in cooperation with the Craft and Folk Art Museum (Los Angeles): 1983.
10. Peggy Post, *Emily Post’s Etiquette*, 16th ed. NY: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 459.
11. David Ignatius. [washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/07/03/july-4-america-national-character-decline/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/07/03/july-4-america-national-character-decline/).
12. New York: Oxford UP, 2007, p. 39. For this book, R.W. thanks his niece, Marla B. Keenan. See also protectionofcivilians.org/report/on-civilian-harm/.
13. How many heptatonic (seven-pitch) scales would you guess exist? Yes! Each of the seven constitutes a *mode*, the most familiar being the *Ionian* of (say) “Jingle Bells.” To hear this scale, begin at *female deer*, continue to *a drink with jam and bread*, and arrive at the second *deer* (thus covering an octave). If you begin the [Ionian on C](#), you can begin the other six scales on:
 - D, [Dorian](#). The blues scale as well as “Scarborough Fair.”
 - E, [Phrygian](#). “White Rabbit,” Jefferson Airplane.
 - F, [Lydian](#). “Hey, Jude,” chorus at end.
 - G, [Mixolydian](#). “Sweet Child O’ Mine,” Guns N Roses.
 - A, [Aolian](#). “We Three Kings,” John Henry Hopkins, Jr.
 - B, [Locrian](#). “Army of Me,” Björk.

Listen to the full list of modes on YouTube:



Title: Diatonic Modes Playlist

Creator: David E. Lee, August 2025.

Direct Link: youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmgrp-2oarQlMiOK7Q3lR1b4EsX5sxjcsJ

Each of these scales invites endless instrumental and vocal development. Your author can hum or whistle them. He can even cluck them, tongue against palate, all starting at the comfortable pitch of C below middle C. (Never invited back by Emily Post.)

Scripture 23

The Estate V: "A Little Skid Mark"

"A little skid mark," declares Marge: "Looks like you've had a difficult delivery. With forceps."

It all began when a flowerpot crossed the Pacific. A vine called Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) became a sort of Korean kudzu and threatened to woody-perennialize the land. Upon reaching The Estate, it mounted trees as staging areas for an eventual assault on the cabin. Every so often I would snip its twisters while negotiating a steep incline crowded with thornstalks, pine branches, wild grapevines, and galax. But I finally had to summon General Landscaper and his Hispanic mercenaries.

One day I conducted reconnaissance along the other side of the old logging trail and down the hill. Spotting a vine in the canopy of a small maple, I cut and yanked it with the long-handled pruner, leaving some biomass to hang like an oxbow lake of foliage. Then I spied a skinny, trunk-hugger. Extending the red-handled loppers, I leaned over the incline, stretched out my arms, aimed, and pulled the handles together to cut only air. Chuckling, I remembered a short story called "The Most Dangerous Game," whose protagonist reaches for his dropped pipe and falls overboard. (1) Grateful for the warning, I leaned an inch farther—and sailed free.

Reattached to earth with a smash, I belly-flopped down the slope helpless, limbs dragging, able only to wonder about the next seconds as I watched from behind my safety lenses as they plowed scruff. My glissade stopped abruptly, perhaps after ramming the very tree I had been attending. Chakras joggled, afraid for my hurting neck, I managed to get to my knees, retrieve the loppers, struggle up the bank, find the pruner, grasp & lift it, and make my way up to the Cabin. My forehead and nose were cut and abraded, and Tom's wide-brimmed gift had a bloody spot. Eyesight intact. But for a day or two my whole body was sore, and for several weeks my neck drew a yell when it rotated while looking down.

An e-mailed report of this accident drew replies. Tom: "I doubt that the hat was safety tested for that use." Richard: "Bad things always happen when we try to do something under conditions of cold sobriety." Dudley: "Be advised that the family name is Wells, not Wallenda."



The chronic near-drought caused us to buy an above-ground cistern that collected rainwater from the roof via a network of gutters. It was almost as tall as me and as wide as my outstretched arms. A chain of hoses from the pump in the carport let me water all the trees we had lowered as root-balls—indeed, an incipient arboretum. I made thunder-noise to entertain Marge (the first time). Once as the hose lay straight down the gravel, its shadow undulated a couple feet away—a puzzle solved when I recognized it as a trail dribbled from the carried nozzle.

One day I noticed that the cover of the cistern was dislodged. An animal? The wind? A forgetful husband (partner's theory)? I wrestled it on tightly after balancing my way along a half-wall of concrete blocks and bending over a space onto the sloped top of the great tub. Later I remembered how we had left grand-Sid alone for a while on a visit, time enough for him to fill a jar of seeds and dirt with hose-water rather than leaving it moist. Over the phone we asked Andrea to question the boy, whose wide-eyed response was, "Did I put it back right?"

Another time I opened a faucet onto a sputter. All weekend we were forced to haul the precious liquid from grocery store and (for plants) the cistern. We lost sleep over the possibility that the water of Floyd County, both hidden and zig-zag, had failed us after eight years. So we would have to drink in the view. We were reduced to hoping for a broken pump or, failing that, a deepened well or a second one elsewhere on the property. Would I grasp the last straw of a dowser's stick? Without a water supply, our house would be like our inherited motor home without gasoline.

The rescue-chariot arrived first thing Monday morning in the guise of a workaday truck. When Bob tested the electric current in the basement and at the pump, both sparked obediently. So was the well sand-sucking dry? He apologized for the next step as primitive: holding a small rock over the pipe, he let it go, and after two or three seconds.... *Splash*.

Whatever the cause, problem fixed. But the drought continued. Drier.... Driest. Then in the middle of the night I heard a gentle ambience. Don't get your hopes up, probably just the ceiling fan. I cocked my ears toward the open window and made out steadiness. Ahhh. In the daytime I kept verifying that the sound was still going, and as a bonus it took my memory to the loud pitter on-umbrellas when Tom and I walked to high school with a friends. "I went outside to move one of the hoses," reported Marge, "and heard drops on my raincoat."



Last year's nest, this year's child.



A half-grown cat wandered onto the grounds, someone's responsibility and nobody's. In the frigid darkness it plaintive-meowed and hobbled because of a bum rear-leg. I clapped it away. No pets allowed: we travel too often, we abhor songless feather-piles, and we already had a pair of guards—carved Shishi-Dog bookends given to me by Cap as a souvenir of Okinawa. The black-and-white interloper made forays toward the house and dart-limped away. A telephone call to the animal control department brought a yawn.

Out came a dish of milk, which invited a hesitant approach followed by a meow and a lapping. When I hoisted up the stray, it was like an empty fur purse. I began to warm the milk and soon mixed it with Half & Half. The cat would follow me around. Once as I carried its purring and increasing weight, a riled-up barking caused it to leap out of my arms and race to a bundle of towels on the covered barbecue grill. Then we sheltered it in the pole barn via an upholstered box near an electric heater. Our dependent seemed comfy even though its bowl of water froze. To Sidney I explained that the ice would melt if supplied by heat, and I asked if he knew where this energy would come from. He drew a blank. So we stepped outside, where I pointed toward satin tucks in the clouds; he retrieved the bowl and set it under the feeble rays.

Marge and I were grateful to the Humane Society for organizing a group excursion to the veterinarian's that included a gift-pack of stitches, and grateful to the local Cat Lady for arranging an adoption after five weeks. Despite repeated explanations, Sidney could not understand the animal's disappearance: "That's the pole barn where Tuxedo isn't."

Years later I would set a bag of garbage on the front porch to await transit to the Green Box. At a thumping, I vowed, "Surely not," cracked the door, and beheld the furry shapes of a mother bear and two cubs. At my applause, which they mistook as admonition, the threesome skedaddled. Yet the next night they burst through the replaced screen to find that the hoped-for bag had vanished.

Flakes scatter under a strangely blue sky, wafting, spiraling, dipping, falling, rising, jerking as if to evade a predator, swooping down to the snow-pile or down and back up, some frantically trying to migrate back to their northern origin, a few approaching the window of the glass door, one managing to stick momentarily. The whistling varies between a moaning and a shrill overtone as the flakes shoot past the tall hardwood trunks on the opposite hill. More creaking as the superstructure bends. Again a toneless hum, then another whistling.



Boar (male bear) on rampage makes white slashes on an arborvitae.



“Hawthorn” tree delivered to the P.O. in an envelope twelve years earlier. Maybe a Bradford Pear.

Clouds slide down the pale blue sky behind the nearby hardwood crowns, which bob gently or sway, each in its own rhythm, each branch and twig silhouetted as it seems to poke out of Storkers Knob, named for a Revolutionary War veteran, a mile or two in the background.

A few nights earlier we were besieged by the fiercest wind since Hurricane Hugo *crack-a-cracked* the pines around us in South Carolina. Because of the roar we decided to sleep in the basement bedroom, which is windowless and protected by earthworks. Yet I became too warm under the comforter and next to the heater, so I re-climbed two sets of stairs and lay near the roof. It held up-and-on as the building swayed, its profile a liability on a ridge. Indeed, we were told that the original settlers always built Down Low.

Once as Marge and I hiked up Annie Lane, she exclaimed, “The tree is gone!” At this nonsense I patiently scanned the field and yard but saw nothing amiss. Marge: “The dead trunk.” I now recognized emptiness where the bottom half had offered both perch and home-hole for birds. I uneasily remembered pushing it and feeling a slight give while craning upward to see which way to bolt.

The interior of the biggest Leyland cypress—yellowish branches and gummy trunk—seemed to give the lie to apparent robustness. An expert stuck his head into the deep pocket and pronounced the tree moribund. When we asked Faith and Kathleen to cut it down, in part so we wouldn’t have to watch it fail, they said “Wait” (and rightly so).



Spring paid another visit, as did our first grandchild. When he picked up a handful of 57 and set it next to the driveway, Gigi asked him why. “So they’ll turn into dirt.” As a more promising venture he and I scattered flower-seeds. “The little guy,” as his father called him, then rode uphill and down in the red wheelbarrow, smiling and holding tight atop the bags of store-bought compost, one per trip. We mixed the three sackfuls into the brown dirt that I had wheeled to declivities. Two-toed tracks punctuated several of the older and muddy patches, inviting me to remind Sidney of our winter’s trek in the snow. Luckily we finished before a gray rumbling brought more than a few raindrops. Gigi, pleased that we had enjoyed our venture so much, gave Sid a bath but unenthusiastically swept Black Kow off the stairs.

In July our volunteer vegetable garden—the compost pile—bore a flower, leaves, and a vine with its lone acorn-squash, a volunteer from kitchen scraps. Marge’s practiced fingers estimated its diameter as 10 cm and tape-measured it as 9.5. In a reverse process, the juicy berries of the pokeweed bush sometimes reconstituted themselves as purple-flecked scat.

When the Hollingers visited from Florida, Tom joined Randall and Marjory on a hike up The Buffalo. This hump of a leftover mountain, a monadnock, is visible from almost everywhere in Floyd County. Following a back-&-forth path for an hour or so, we reached the summit, rewarded by the view—not of the Blue Ridge Plateau as it spread to the horizon, but of a tall outcropping in the fog.



October again brought hues that varied kaleidoscopically according to species and light (both intensity and angle). “Come look!” we often declared to one another. Once again Storkers Knob slowly materialized across the valley as the intervening trees shed their sun-catchers. As an experiment, I stopped cutting down whatever it was that had been planted by the landscaper and had grown on the northwest slope by the house. What should begin to arise but something wheat-ish, eventually reaching seven feet like the herbage on an original Midwestern Prairie: native switchgrass. One day I was pushing Mr. Boy on his little bicycle when somehow it veered into the reeds despite my efforts to make the handlebars behave, so the wheels plummeted through the swaying and rustling reeds. “Again!”

After a few years on the Estate, we decided to investigate the great boulder. Making our way along the lane and through the woods, we negotiated rough footing, the eye-level branches of scrub pines, the prickles of small hawthorns, and the blacksnake, a rivulet of crude-oil that trickled over the brown leaves and disappeared. The uphill face of the rock bore dark, delicate leaf-shapes cast by the autumn sun when the surface was partly screened by the foliage of a black-gum tree, red and green. About six feet at its highest and ten at its widest, the rock had end-edges that were beveled and slightly pointed; asymmetrical, its top rose a bit on the left.

A swale had been carved out at the bottom, probably by rainwater rushing downhill and then around the obstacle. This two-foot-deep indentation was outlined by hefty slabs, one of them leaning near the corner from which it had apparently fractured.

Immoveable, yes, but had it once flipped out of its stratum after some geological event? Or eroded from its parent-material over the eons? Had a lintel crashed from the Tabernacle of Time? Had a projectile catapulted from the rebellious Celestial City? Already moss and lichen were nibbling at it, and a miniature tree had taken root in a crack. Did the boulder’s swale-side trace the line between nature and art? For weren’t those long cracks inscriptions? Tell me, don’t those two legs stretch almost parallel to the ground from the body of—of the fable-furred *Hapax legomenon*?



The author's cap atop millions of years.

One day we made our way behind its massive rotundity, and beheld—vacancy! Just space behind an upright slab that protruded from a mound of dirt. The top leaned almost two feet out of plumb. Its top edge, which we measured as seven inches at its thickest, narrowed to a fairly sharp spine. The bottom measured only two feet at its widest. How far into the dirt did the rock go? To a tentative push it offered no response, nor to a hard one. Yet in another million years it would fracture into scree along the ridge-side. Our private Stonehenge.

When Sidney favored us with another visit, Gigi took him to this grotto. Before she could do anything, the almost-four-and-a-half year old planted his left foot on the broken-off boulder, pulled himself partway up by gripping the spine, tramped up its face by his sneakers, and straddled it like a horse. “It’s easy!” When his Aunt Katie first beheld the rock, up she leaped to fold her torso over the cap, head now invisible and jeans warmed by the declining autumn sun. She finally slid down and leaned against its bright front-surface. What could a dancer-choreographer could do with a rock? “Lots of things. You can balance upside down, or on your belly, hip, or knee. You can slide, roll, crawl, lie, melt, press, slam, jump!”

One morning white flakes covered our deck, and neighbors wondered who would be the first to venture down the steep twists of Annie. Marge declared that snow is her favorite weather—“You can watch it, feel the cold flakes, and see the change in the landscape.” You can also



hear the wind discharge like a turbine and transform flakes from a dithering jumble to a stream of avengers. Gusts obscured a window or two by whipping up snow-smoke as if from a frozen ground-fire. “Sun,” announced Marge cheerily when the flakes seemed to be abating under the power of a blue as vivid as the clouds were quick. The tall patches of spelt or whatever rippled and glowed.

Happening to wake around 2:30 a.m., I decided to go outside and view the lunar eclipse, a doubly unusual one because it occurred on the winter solstice. I tugged a rag-patch sweater over my pajamas, donned a bathrobe, then wrapped a turtle-neck shirt around my head and neck like the cartoon version of someone with a toothache. Outside I strained to see through batts of gray insulation. Clouds had blocked the view of the earthly shadow that was inching across its satellite. As for the dawn itself—it also turned out to be veiled. All day long the solar furnace could be imputed only by a pale-ing of air and a dripping of ice.

NOTE

Richard Connell, “The Most Dangerous Game,” *Collier’s Weekly*, Jan. 18, 1924.



Marjory gazes at stones aged millions of years ago and assembled thousands, 1971. Photo by author.

Scripture 24

Proverbs II: "Lick the Knife of Life"

More secular adages—instructional, metaphorical, philosophical, whimsical, and why not sardonic.

No *wisdumb* such as “Everything happens for a reason.” The process of turning the wood of sagacity into art requires that the product not be:

1. *Highbrow*: “Eschew an unfamiliar word such as *apothegm*.”
2. *Obvious*: “Don’t sit on a railroad track.” (Unless it’s clearly also metaphorical.)
3. *Particular*: “While visiting a local dance show in Eswatini, do not let a very drunk, rotund Swazi woman greet you with a big hug and knock you to the ground.”
4. *Wordy*: “An asset already under one’s control enjoys twice the value of one whose proprietorship is merely speculative.”

Don’t open you car door into one with the driver inside.

Stay in your clan & check out your cuz.

If you love risk, you’ll love love.

To earn a friend, clock in.

Friends don’t see friends’ Depends.

Don’t think of friends as contacts but they will be.

A friend has a winter bed in Florida.

Don’t try to whistle polyphony.

A thin wallet can hold fat bills.

Nobody needs to know everything.

Give a rip, don't make one.

Don't bind feet or bonsai brains.

Don't die of yourself.

Lick the knife of life.

Don't keep your head above water.

This world is round, not square, so what you do today tomorrow you may bear (after
Terry Hyatt).

Leave more in the tip jar than you take out.

No Pony, no Santa.

Guilt is one size too small.

Don't use an A lead pencil as a B or vice versa.

Treasure the one who makes you look good.

Only a fool makes the same mistake twice, twice.

Fool me once, fool me twice, fool me three times, that's not nice

Don't screw the olive lid onto the artichoke jar.

Short legs reach the ground.

Bad breath blows an oboe.

A deaf engineer can sound the horn.

Nobody starves for lack of a fork.

D on't amputate a restless leg.

H is eye is on the sparrow while a mouse toasts in the Oster.

N o expiration date for hunger or speed limit for hurry.

D on't shake champagne.

E xtra onions ain't Onions Extra.

S leeping pills can last a lifetime.

G uns don't kill, bullets do.

O ne stick, two kids, three eyes.

C onfidence on ice is bad traction.

T he first duty of an institution is to perpetuate itself.

T o grasp a hair of the *Hapax legomenon* is a fatal phenomenon.

D on't chew both gum and popcorn.

E verybody's got a chicken story, may be guts, may be glory.

C at on the lap, two together, cat on the grass, many a feather.

R am or Rat, same truck.

N either thunder nor sunshine can fill a cistern.

D on't Know through life.

Scripture 25

D & M VII:

Experimental, Transitory, and Equivocal

May this scripture serve as a reminder that Plenitude does not mean fixitude.

A new category can emerge—i.e., Dancing in Stores (below). And an old one, or its member, can change or perish, even a Diesel locomotive. Any classification—yea, secularity itself—can be problematic.

Question 1. Whether a class can be experimental.

Somewhere along Interstate 95 from South Carolina to Florida, the Wellses took a break for a footlong divided in half. Over the counters of merchandise the author noticed a young sandwich-slinger. She was doing a few steps to an ambient tune, perhaps singing along, while gently waving a utensil, her apron a costume. The very picture of joie de vivre! And somehow within an ambiance of mustard, Mobil Oil, and Marlboros! It was as inspiring as “Song of the Lark,” painted by Jules Adolphe Bretron (1884).

I remembered dancing by myself to a calliope, in Holland, at Keukenhof flower gardens. After tentative whirls and bends, I had enlisted a beaming grandmother as a partner (moments recorded on video by Richard). Now, on New Year’s Day of 2019, I made a vow: “No matter how many, no matter how tinny, *I will dance to all piped-in!*”

More moxie than confidence. But for encouragement I should have remembered when, in about 1958, Tom and I entered the town’s outdoor-had dance contest. My mother hadpressed red paste onto my lips, lent me pedal-pushers, and disguised my crewcut with a girly hat. I then squeezed into her pumps and removed my glasses. As Tom and I moved through the crowd, he introduced me as his cousin, and we won second prize. (1)

So how did my whimsical resolution turn out? Enlisting the words of St. Thomas, how manifold the venues, how distinct the experiences?

Gainesville.

- * *Publix Super Market*: Shopping with Marge & Tom. Can’t buy confidence, persevered.
- * *Fresh Market*: Genial conflict with wine vendor: “I’m going to cut you off.”
- * *Publix* by University of Florida: Marge joined me for a moment. Although I pushed a cart in a circle as an accessory, I decided not to push the managers, too, by dancing in the same store twice.
- * *Patti’s Coffee Shop*: Next to Bo Diddley Park, the whole place one inviting aisle. Monique i.d.’d the singer as Leon Bridges.

Cedar Key. *Duncan's Restaurant:* Upstairs while looking through the screens at the Gulf of Mexico—water and sky each of them blue—danced to the Jimmy Buffett station on Sirius XM. Audience: Tom, Sandy, Marge and pelicans.

Gainesville. *Francesca's Trattoria:* Early dinner, few people, many candles on tables—and carpeting, a proprioceptive treat-for-the-feet. Announced intention to convert necktie collection to dance costume, but Sandy recommended that instead I revive the bow-and-arrow project.

New Smyrna Beach.

- * *Mom's Restaurant:* Too noisy for canned music. Friend Don pointed to the dormant radio and explained my quest to the cashier, who turned on a '50s station and smiled when I set rhythm-to-floor, waffle-powered.
- * *CVS:* Had a long aisle to myself, carpeted in squares, past rolls of Christmas wrapping paper. Don's appraisal: "Looks like tai chi." Told cashier I didn't mind waiting in line if I could keep moving. Dorothy laughed: "Dance away!"
- * *Publix:* No music audible in store but at departure Don heard tunes in foyer. Opposite a wall of Dasani packs, I immersed myself in the sound, no vocals, almost all mere beat. "He's from out of town," my graduate-school pal explained to a customer pushing an empty cart. Hearing that I was celebrating the weather—"No 27-degrees-and-snow"—she gave me a smile.



I-75 south of Gainesville. Mini Mart BP: Men's toilets, danced to "Take out the papers and the trash." Someone taking a leak, so I took leave.

Gainesville.

The Oaks Shopping Center:

- * *Mall bathroom:* danced along approximately 24 squares, each about 2' X 2', color of oatmeal—until someone came in. Unknown male was crooning to the ceiling.
- * *Mall directory:* freestanding: circled its flecked tile. Costume of blue, thin sweatshirt with "Columbia" label. Undistinguished choreography and execution, but (as said to Marge) "I wouldn't want to call attention to myself."
- * *Belk, Men's Department:* waved straw-colored pair of Saddlebred denims. Started dancing unconsciously to a song, a reminder of the original "What a gift it is to be alive." (Vocalist: Katy Perry.)
- * *Fitting area:* emerging to show Marge a try-on pair of jeans, did a little routine of standing one foot and pumping the other. Music unknown, "Buh-bye," as I pranced back around the corner.
- * *Down-elevator:* Although not musical, it clicked invitingly four times a second as I responded somatically. *The Children's Place:* Both inspiration and tile were dull. Walked around one stack circular, another rectangular, passing dresses, purses, bracelets. Stymied.

Then music came on with a drumbeat of two per second. Began to step from one square to another per beat—fast. Traipsed the length of store, 14 X 4-steps-at-a time. Decided to make another round trip with fancier footwork, smiled and breathed a little hard at the end (Marge’s own huffs concerned a price.)

* *Starbucks*: Danced around the long table to Frankie Ruiz, singer i.d.’d by Alison. Oblong titles, irregular designs with two smeary shades of taupe.

* *Total Wine*: Total Terpsichore, final jig & gig, January 19.

Randall’s resolution, like most, endured for less than three weeks. He danced approximately once a day in an unexpected assortment of venues besides the wine emporium: grocery stores, a department store, a children’s store, two coffee shops, two bathrooms, an escalator, nondescript areas, a highway mini-mart, a drugstore-pharmacy, and restaurants owned by Duncan, Francesca, and Mom.



Question 2. Whether a classification be dynamic.



Alice scans the refracted One True Crayola.

Total Wine is the *oenoverse*, an endless array of varietals, bottles (colors, sizes, shapes, and locations), brands, prices, vines, vintages, countries of origin. Yet the merchandise of any store in the chain alters by the moment as one bottle is removed by a customer and another added by an employee, and the Top fifteen wines of this summer won’t all be on next year’s list.

A box of crayons, too, never remains static, for the cylinders stubby down. And the manufactured collections themselves change: seventy years after the author discovered the multiple-rowed cache in his friend’s box, his granddaughter drew pictures with the help of an undreamed-of setup. Crayons were augmented by pencils and two sizes of felt-tipped markers; waxy hues increased to fifty-six; and labels became “wild strawberry,” “brick red,” and “macaroni and cheese.” The Latinate “Carmine” became “violet red/rojo violeta/rouge violet.”

Civic transience: Rome was first condemned for being pagan, then Catholic. For Muslims, a beard was a threat until it became a requirement. Even worldly continents move around! Presumed fixed when the author took Physical Geography in college, they now float. If tectonic plates roam for a billion years, what can be stable underfoot? In fact, any classification and its particulars might be viewed to one degree or another as in flux: “Just accordin” (Mr. Stanley).

Can any physical object be thought of as permanent? Certainly a railroad locomotive! One in North Carolina is identified by the caption of a photo as a *General Purpose 4000*. (2) This machine will make you Stop, Look, & Listen to a rolling compendium of sensory alarms—a fume-throbbing, horn-blaring, heat-spreading, rail-hugging, ton-tugging equivalent of four-and-a-half miles of horses that bears two headlights and two yellow capital letters within red squares.

Yet is the *GP* not at the same time an abstraction? Does it not participate *locomotiveness*? For as many versions of this engine exist as it is perceived by engineers, brakemen, mechanics, and vehicular-drivers who wait at a crossing. It could be a mystery of atoms, quarks & quiddities. It slowly redefines *dynamic* as *declining*. And the *YouTube Special* (p.86)? Although disappeared and disassembled, it can still roar along neurons.

Ralph Roe (former dairy-farm slave) notes that tanker trucks put O&W out of business a few years later and the tracks were torn up. Rails become trails. Dinosaurs shrank to birds. Cigarettes, which provided many jobs, frequent camaraderie, and a pleasant rush—became suicide-cylinders. The ivory keys of “Grandma’s” upright piano (the author’s starter-instrument) became not only fragile but out of favor. The rapunzel plant got a capital letter as a folk-character, then as an illustrated book, then as an animated movie.

Windshields, for those who buckle up, ceased to be a means of violent egress. Vehicular grills—repositories of chromium meant to decorate, impress, or intimidate—became iffy with the advent of electric motors. The little duty of eliminating, washing, dressing, and attending to appearance, became a “toilet,” then a commode, then became a “bathroom,” then a “restroom,” then a “restroom.” Tattoos jumped from sailors onto ladies, but the name of one ex was “rosed out.” Even presidents vanish:

Lincoln sat on a railroad track
Bearded-profile cent.
Freight of Fate came ‘round the bend—
Toot-toot copper dent!

French fries became “freedom fries,” which became eat-crow fries served with Iraqi *amba* sauce. Japanese became Japs, who after World War II reverted to Japanese, a ship-full of whom decided to become Argentineans. Seventy years after the Allied assault on the Germans in Normandy, 1944, Randall and Marge toured the beach area in a Mercedes-Benz because, according to the driver, “the Renault van was junk.” The baby sequoia from California succumbed to Carolina.

Boxes shipped to the USA from Viet Nam changed from coffins to cartons (photo).

A brand or model of a vehicle might disappear, so that Dudley’s Corvair joined other forever-parked vehicles mentioned in Angel; Figaro of the fenders; the Fiat 500 Lego; the Deux Chevaux of a dozen rattles; the Henry J of Rufus M. and Trespassers W; the Graf & Stift that



figuratively killed author's great-uncle Walter E. Capps; the DKW sedan in Baluchistan (dusty thumbulance); the golden Hudson sedan; the swept-sidewalk-side Packard; the lust-tempting Studebaker; the Plymouth wagon of the Celestial Desert; the Oldsmobile of the genteel-pumping transmission; and the Marmon truck of the standing-up grandson.

Dog breeds actually arise (yes, I humbly acknowledge the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel) and disappear. Even paintings: according to Rockwell Kent, after the French Revolution, many a painting slid off the Greatness Wall to the Famous Floor. But a new kind of trophy arose: *For Participation* (i.e., *Prize for Tries*). The hemlock species may follow the Gros Michel banana to oblivion. How many years can a load of sixty-six ping-pong tables tough it out? Forty-eight states lasted until two were added about the same time Randall began keeping journal.

Aquinas, in his high regard for God's once-and-for-all creations, could not be expected to reckon with the plasticity of species. For example some lizards decided to "travel light" (the inscription by Jennifer Pharr Davis in Randall's copy of *Called Again*, see footnote 4). So they dissolved their legs in embryo or packed them as miniatures toward the tail-ends of creatures such as Seba's pythons & boa constrictors. Little did the great monk dream that the precursor of whales would abandon the deep for terra firma, then as semi-aquatic species return to waves and to never-used sea-legs. Or that ancestors of humans would yet swim around in their clothed and bony bodies. (3)



Julien's mask challenges Aquinas' theory of benign plenitude.

In this photo, taken at the San Francisco Academy of Sciences in 2021, Julien meets Lucy, his metaphorical grandmother. Although species have always evolved or gone extinct, the threatened or accomplished disappearance of so many—birds, insects, frogs, trees—seems ungodly.

James 1:17 declares: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (openbible.info/topics/god_is_unchanging, accessed June 2022.) But one surprise, although not a gift, did come from below: a volcanic island that emerged off the coast of Iceland. Decades later, Randall and Marjory beheld newby-Surtsey across a railing of the *Marco Polo*.

This vessel was originally a cruise ship, then became an ocean liner. It made the final voyage (figuratively from Wuhan, China) to a beach in Alang, India, where in 2021 it was scrapped. ("MS Marco Polo," *Wikipedia*, accessed March

11, 2023.)

The quality of the author's North Atlantic voyages changed considerably after five decades. On the *Nova Scotia*, his bundled-up coat and sleeping bag partly offset the slow... roll.... The *Queen Mary 2* gently swung a tuxedo in the closet.

Lady Doctors drove off with "Check your oil?" guys. The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P), the largest retail grocery chain in the United States from 1915 to 1975, sank into both its oceans. (*Wikipedia*, accessed Feb. 2023.) So the Eight O'Clock Coffee machine that once prompted Tom's request that I grind some coffee—"Drip"—now dispenses barnacles.

(A nearby shopper, Widow Smith, gives me a lovely smile. But I can only return a quick, embarrassed one. Did she recognize me? No doubt she knew that her relative, a nurse, had told that her husband had "expired"—an event expected any minute.)

A whole new category can materialize. One candidate is *Last Rememberer*, a title that identifies the final person on earth who recalls someone. In my case, it was Sophia, born in the early 1870s, who in 1949 raised her age-spotted hand to mine in a nursing home. These same fingers that must have held The Telegram. The honorable last-one title deserves a Greek term such as the *Hapax legomenon*—words that actually mean "the sole occurrence of a word in any context." Why not call it **ὁ τελευταῖος ἀναμνησκων**. (Translation courtesy of Tim Smith, Ph.D.)

The author, immensely grateful to the U.S.A., could never feel at home anywhere else. Yet over the decades his Fellow Citizens tended to become Other Residents. He and his spouse occasionally threaten a move to Canada, an impractical notion; yet like many Americans, they have snipped a few threads between flag and backpack.

Question 3: Whether secular people both gain and lose

The author expresses his appreciation to St. Thomas Aquinas for the model of a Categorama. Randall acknowledges that making light of a religious treatise is easier than superseding it. And he understands that in a world of transience, humans crave permanence; of imperfection, the ideal; of chaos, authority; of pollution, purity.

"This is my Father's World," the author's favorite hymn as a child, celebrates a patrimony not to be taken literally by adults. Can this single dad actually rotate the globe while revolving it around the sun? And at the same time supervise events as well as answer prayers uttered in a babel of languages? And work on that swing. With his eye upon the birdie.

Freethinkers forfeit a sense of divinely ordained purpose. "What do you think God is telling you?" asked a friend as Jennifer Pharr Davis through-hiked on the Appalachian Trail at a record pace. Her answer: "That I am supposed to be here. Not necessarily that I'm going to set a record, but that somehow, in some way, this is part of his plan for my life. (4) The sense of divine



Surtsey above sea.



Digital drawing ©Paul O. Zelinsky.

agency can be valuable along any earthly trail—with its figurative rocks, loose or slippery; spirit-drenching rain; a yellow pudding of slugs discovered in a shoe; a leg-swelling yellow-jacket or territorial copperhead; a dangerous river-ford; sickness; a falling down and even a falling-out. But how well does the notion of a holy plan explain negative outcomes (Sophia’s grandson)?

Randall’s “Uncle” Charlie, Ph.D., collected vinyl 33⅓ records. As his ears gradually filled with neuronal cotton, the grooves became slightly lined with mold, so the needle no longer registered even the voices that accompany a libretto.

When tying a ribbon around a gift, the author often remembers how his longtime boss at the A & P, Mr. Paul Truschke, accorded him a second, patient lesson in tying a rope-knot around a pile of broken-down cardboard boxes. After being transferred from Glen Ellyn, Paul was murdered outside his store in Chicago.

While driving Katie & friends to a birthday party, the author noticed one girl’s face in the rear-view mirror: Emily was delicately beautiful and sparkle-eyed, animated like her voice, which nevertheless remained soft as she rallied her friends to a higher level of *joie de vivre*. A few years later, her coffin was rolled to a mausoleum, where her father, Rich, and the author shared a futile hug.

To guard hope at the prospect of life’s end—of one’s own or someone else’s—how gratifying! When the author asked a recent widow how she hoped to get through Christmas, she replied: by avoiding grief-sessions, by spending time with her family, and most of all, by *Believing in God*. Although she raised her voice and pointed overhead, the author discerned fluorescent lights.

A card-carrying secularist expects no after-death escape to Ceylon-in-the-Sky, where angels wait on the blissful shore or where an ever-sixtyish brother pedals a bike on the sand. More likely an unbeliever imagines an old-time cigar-factory in Cuba, where someone reads aloud to the laborers during the monotonous hours. (mashable.com/features/cigar-factory-lectors, accessed Aug. 2022.) Or a room where ceiling-music comforts the blessed 24/7—perhaps even the author’s CD, *Sephardad: Songs of the Spanish Jews in the Mediterranean and the Ottoman Empire* (DHM, 1996).

“Uns” admit no He-ity. So we benefit less from Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization that calls for reliance on a higher power. We pine for no “king.” For one reason, monarchs have typically shown their butts: Leopold II of Belgium trashed the Congo, and not a few have wrecked the Ship of State. One ruler, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, even destroyed an actual vessel when he insisted upon a second deck of cannons, an alteration that caused it to tip over and sink with fifty sailors.

What in the world is that thrashing cacophony?!

What else but the *GP 4000* ! It has started up with a reluctant *putta-putta* and now throbs loudly behind me, fumes in advance. Now as the cab passes on the right, I see that the engineer wears—a scapula! It covers a friar’s robe! Why, it is who else but the *Summa* Saint! From the open



Souvenir of the
*Sanctuaries Notre-Dame
de Lourdes*, France, a
major Roman Catholic
pilgrimage site.
Gift of Theresa and
Kerry Earhart.

window, his oversize white sleeve billows in the slipstream and dangles a long, red-and-black strip of fabric that bobs and twists backward. Now he sounds the horn before a road-crossing—*Long, long, short, long*—and cranes around to shout “Vale!”

NOTES

1. And as a precedent, how about that Saturday morning in about 1959? “Tom is here!” My mother was calling upstairs. “He wants to know if you want to walk to Chicago.” What?! The Loop was twenty-two miles to the east! Once you got past the homey sidewalks of Glen Ellyn, you would have to share a road between-towns, then more local cement underfoot, then an endless series of red-green-yellows and cross-traffic, buses emitting ghost-gas, horns blowing, manual gears shifting. Luckily I could beg off since I had my own walking to do, on grass behind a mower, although these jobs could have waited. Tom did attain his quest and more: on the return train he fell asleep, woke in a panic, got off at a stop too early, and footed it home for several more miles.

2. Michael George and Frank Strack, *Passage Through Time: A Milepost Guide for the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad*, 2000, p.33. Photo by Jim King.

3. Neil Shubin. *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year-History of the Human Body*. York: Pantheon, 2008. Book shared by T. Hollinger.

4. *Called Again: A Story of Love and Triumph*. New York: Beaufort Books, 2013, p. 212. In 2011, averaging forty-seven miles a day, Jennifer, or what was left of her, broke the record for the fastest through-hike on the A.T. The author met her in 2021, an honor similar to meeting Edgar Mitchell, the moonwalker. Ms. Davis also praises her husband for his triple support — logistical, physical, and emotional.

Author’s note. Sometime after returning from the World, I recognized a young Pakistani who for unrolled his prayer rug at 646 Kenilworth. In 2025 I requested the backstory from his host:

I met Jalal-ud-din Shamas in Lahore after being given his name by the Muslim family who hosted me near Sialkot. He taught me how to make chapatis with water-buffalo butter. When I returned to Glen Ellyn, we corresponded, and he expressed a desire to come to the USA. The Hollingers offered to host him as an employee of my father’s glass-working factory. He lived with us until he could support himself with an independent job. Jalal later married, enjoyed a good family, and produced many grandchildren. His decision to leave home altered the trajectory for three, soon to be four, generations. What an honor it is to have contributed to his opportunity.

And what a piece of luck it is for Jalal and Randall to have contracted with Tom’s Travel, Inc.

Author’s note. The baseball-capped lampshade—Found Art! So I took a photo and on a whim emailed it to Paul Zelinsky. Darn if he didn’t reply with these words—“Looks like a fez”—and with the following portrait, an example of what might be termed Cumulative Art.



Scripture 26

Geodyyssey VI: "Curve Ahead!"



Purple key to Burma, February 1962.

Brightness hints at shape, color, and volume.

From the floor Tom and I look up and around and remember this railway-telegraph station where we camped in the middle of the night. We pack, roll up, and lift our gear, then climb down the steps to the wide, quiet, dusty streets of Prome, Burma.

How did we get there from the Salvation Army hostel in Calcutta? A few days earlier we had investigated ways of tracing the earth's surface eastward, but the only practical and legal route was by air. So we ended up looking through pressurized glass at the delta of East Pakistan, a fingered map of itself, and sipping the free beer that made UBA (Union of Burma Airways) popular among young travelers.

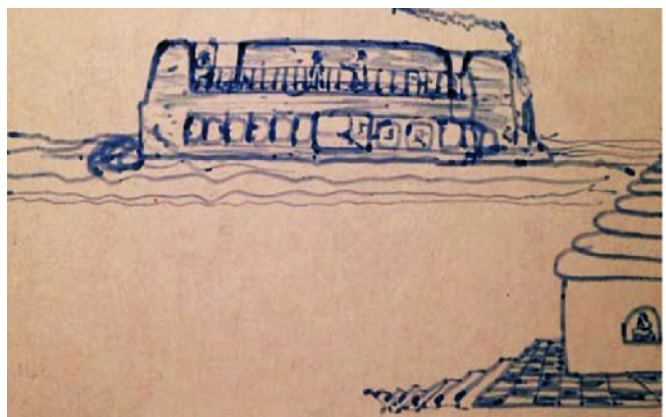
In Rangoon, the capital, women in the market wore gauzy blouses and inhaled stogies. Dodge the spit-out betel-blood! Mingle with the throng of brownish Oriental faces, deal with the aural kaleidoscope of unfamiliar consonants, vowels, rhythms, and pitches. And struggle with the logistics of finding the YMCA, getting around the lively, decaying city, and getting access to the hinterland. Visiting a Buddhist temple, we found a woman guarding our shoes and expecting a tip, but since I was low on currency, I raised my hand and gave her a blessing, which made her grimace in fear and shrink away as if from a curse. When we tried to check out of the Y the next day, nobody came to the desk, so off we went in irritated gratitude.

We reached the platform early so as to get dibs on a wooden-mattress rack. “Cigarette?” In a ritual that had endured throughout Eurasia, I replied “Thanks,” pulling out a Capstan and offering to shoulder the camera strap. From the yards and barn the train slowly rolled in backwards from the right—but hold on! What was wrong in this picture? The carriage windows, instead of reflecting the outside, revealed shadowy figures along with bundles and motion. We watched indignantly as the train came to a stop, already full of passengers who had carried their stuff down the tracks to the empty cars. So now we had to scramble just to make a nest by the doorway. While Tom leaned back on his rolled-up sleeping bag and dozed, I watched his foot to keep it from extending too far outside.

Several hours later, about midnight, our car was summarily emptied of passengers and filled with soldiers. We somehow learned that their purpose was to escort the train through unfriendly territory. Having grabbed a couple of seats, we now played dumb and smiled, whereupon a man intervened and (bless him) got us permission to stay. When the rifles departed at 2 a.m., I inherited a precious baggage rack. After a few hours’ sleep we reached our station, climbed down, and plopped bedrolls onto a floor.

Prome, almost 200 miles from Rangoon, had seemed a more feasible destination than the half-imaginary Mandalay. So here we were, lazing around, cracking jokes in the *dak bungalow* we’d reserved in the city, a wood structure raised on columns and shaded by trees. It housed chairs that one could lie down in, as well as beds with mattresses and mosquito nets. A genial servant would hand us bottles of orange squash. All afternoon we strolled, first to a pagoda that rose crazily from the center of town, then along a sand road enveloped by jungle, where we inhaled flower-scents, pulled off our top shirts, and marveled at the reappearance of forest-and-shadow in a world of rock and baked mud. A honeymoon without so much as a kiss.

Next day we watched the riverbank recede as our large paddleboat twisted down the Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River back toward Rangoon. The balmy air of February clashed with the presence of soldiers, steel shielding, and gun turrets. The lower deck held cargo and the upper deck thirty or so passengers. For two nights we unrolled our sleeping bags on the hard, barely-swaying surface. The vessel would every so often round a bend and then dock gingerly, fruit and



Our cabin: the deck.

merchandise mounting the ramp balanced on the heads of women. Now and then the jungle cleared to reveal a circle of boys who passed a little ball adeptly back and forth with feet and knees. I celebrated my twentieth birthday by joking with Tom and the canteen operator, who served me French toast (sweetener provided by memory) under Christmas lights strung around a dozen Krishnachrome pictures of trunked gods and many-armed women.



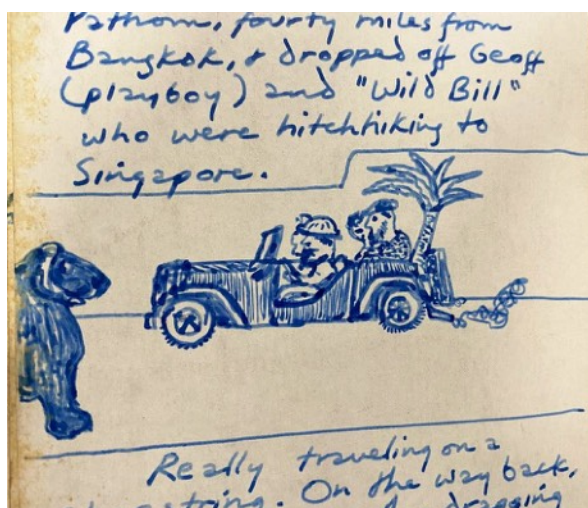
From downstream or upstream Randy waves to Tom.

Back in Rangoon, required to take our second and last airplane trip, we peered below at wrinkled mountains that made the terrain between Burma and Thailand not only forbidding but forbidden.

After landing in Bangkok, we stayed at a hotel where young women poked us with toothpaste tubes and caressed us. Eventually we understood the nature of the business and made an appointment, but it was extinguished by a case of beer given to us by Jim Patterson, a former teacher at our high school. (This was my first alcoholic overindulgence since the *Nova Scotia*.) As his guests we guided Jim's borrowed Jeep along the left side of the road through wild traffic toward American Express, various banks, and travel offices.



Bwana Tom, Joe College, and Fulbright Jim.



One morning we drove Ol' Roofless toward Nakhon Pathom and the prominent uncle of my Maryville College classmate. Our host sat near a baby-grand piano and expressed courteous discomfort. The visit concluded, we breezed through paddies and sugar-palm groves, stopping once to secure the tailpipe with a rawhide bootlace, enjoying the smiles and waves of people along the road. "No wonder!" laughed Jim, as he pointed at Tom, whose pith helmet was fastened under a bushy beard, and at Randy, who wore a nubby red T-shirt with a gaping hole in the back. I did still own a shirt with a stripe for every country visited.

On this expedition whose thumb should we come upon but that of my benefactor, "Wild Bill" Hickok! Last seen at the railway station in Quetta, Pakistan, he had remained on the travelers' circuit but now without wheels, dusty or shiny. He and our other mutual vagabond-acquaintance now rode in the back seat as we drove them forty miles toward Singapore.

As Jim's guests at a fancy swimming pool, we learned that some foreigners called the young king "the Boy Scout." Too much sun, too many big black Asian cockroaches zig-zagging on the sidewalk (most eluding my righteous, too-slow-sole). Waiting and waiting for a loan to be wired from the U.S.A. while I borrowed cash from Tom. After two weeks in Bangkok, we were disappointed only to leave the friendly, Western-dressed girls, especially Tom, no doubt, after learning that women in Thailand appreciate beards because Asian men have less facial hair.



Somewhere southward down the Malay Peninsula I stood watching in a trance as the rails screamed backward from a car at the end of the train. We had begun the final leg of our trip as still-partners. Tom intended to visit Indonesia, where his sister, Anna, had spent half a year as an exchange student. ("I have a vocabulary of 10,000 Indonesian words," he explained. "Unfortunately, all but twelve of them are numbers.") Then he would travel on to Australia and the South Pacific.

Our express train had no Third Class, but since we wanted to reach Singapore without delay, we had splurged on Second. The layout of the cars was American, the first we had seen on the trip: an aisle between two pairs of double seats, which were high-backed and soft, and a dining car. At the end of the train, under a half-roof, we bantered with other travelers and shared Tom's smokes. I searched the jungle and groves of rubber for a glimpse of yet another of those small, conical mountains that glowed pastel in the late afternoon, as if on a different planet. "Did I really see that?!" I once glimpsed a locomotive that sped soundlessly in the opposite direction, on a track about a half mile to the east, as it pulled a tender heaped not with coal but wood. The chilly wind

and the clatter of metal on metal encouraged us to take refuge a carriage or two closer to Singapore.



The next evening, while I ambled along the platform at a station, I reached the black-iron locomotive, parked on the right. But ‘way up in the cab, the open doorway framed a visage—of a bearded white guy, young and familiar! Down the ladder climbed the engineer, who sported an immaculate white ensemble of shirt, tennis shorts, and shoes, and who puffed a cigar as black as he was. In contrast to the silent dignity of the engineer of the water train, he was all amiability. “You boys should have come up before!” He continued to remonstrate in a native sing-song charmingly at odds with British pronunciation. “You would have met the right person—and would have *learned* something.” Now my boots and hands negotiated the ladder.

Inside, our ebullient host offers us a rolled smoke and warns about the smell. “Is it made of rubber?” I ask, a wisecrack that earns the driver’s seat on the right. As the foundry-aftermath chugs off, I am thrilled at the prospect of immense kinetic power fused with even greater control. But instead I peer through a thick, horizontally-oblong pane down the right flank of a massive black cylinder that wobbles and thrashes and thunders along the puny rails, less a mighty guide than a blind monster hurtling full speed while tapping left and right.

“*Curve ahead!*” The words barely sound above the din. Again those stogie-fingers turn various devices that might yet keep the drive wheels from shoveling a grave next to the roadbed—like the locomotive that our Calcutta-bound train slowly passed as if in a funeral cortege. Terrified, I dare to take another glance at the tracks built in a high school shop-class. One of the assistants leans out the left side and yells, “Curve up ahead!” The driver pulls a lever and rotates a wheel. Tom seems to enjoy his stint, but all attempts to converse finally cease. At the next station, I slowly attach my feet and hands to the ladder, descend gingerly, feel the platform accept my weight, unclasp my fingers, and repair to the carriage, having indeed learned something.



We arrived safely at Prai within the hour, changing to a sleek, eighteen-coach train. The next morning we left our berths for a half-hour tour of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. This final consist brought us that afternoon to the island city of Singapore!

We were finally able to distinguish the YMCA from the rest of the buildings. There I found a copy of *Hamlet* and read it behind the auditorium stage in what the script might term a “closet,” a small private room. Murder and madness in blank verse, revenge miscarried, an embedded and rhymed playlet, a young man flailing and faking in a sin-stinking world, and a flight of angels singing him to rest in the subjunctive maybe-mood: tumultuous art relieved the disorder of travel. Another balm was salt water, after we took a bus to the sandy margin of Asia. As we body-surfed in the gleaming waves, I was amazed to be on the opposite side of the ocean I had waded in as an eight-year-old, on Cannon Beach, Oregon, near my Grandfather Wells’ golden Hudson Commodore.

Just as Tom and I had planned from the beginning, we would follow divergent itineraries.

He wanted to visit Indonesia, where Anna had lived as an exchange student, and then Australia; I wanted to reach Japan. So our long travel-partnership had accomplished its goal but reached its conclusion. We had slowly made our way eastward, October to March, and while the globe was spinning imperceptibly in the same direction, it had also finished almost half a circuit around the sun. Where had we spent the night?

- * In a moving van, a luxury apartment, and a dormitory at MIT (thanks to a high school acquaintance, before actually boarding the *Nova Scotia*);
- * On a ship’s rolling and pitching berth;
- * In London, on the floor or in an armchair of several alumna of the *Nova Scotia*, their apartment still lit at night and gratefully beheld by two castaway hitchhikers from Liverpool;
- * On the floor of a rural elementary school in Herefordshire, England; and in a resort hotel in North Wales owned by the parents of a Nova Scotia lass, our sleeping bags unrolled atop the bedding;
- * On a ferry across the English Channel, on a construction site, in a hostel, in an arrêt de bus in Paris and beneath a *Daunenbett* at a German inn (its weight a barrier for digesting cream and sausage);
- * Aboard trains on floors, benches, racks, a berth, and a thick leather-covered Maharaja-mat (Randy);
- * In YMCAs, on the carpet of a border-straddling customs headquarters, in the hotel of the souvenir key, in houses and apartments;
- * On the headache-train and then on the two-day overland coach, in a sort of barracks, in a dog-haunted hovel, on a campfire-train, in candle-lit village houses;
- * In railway rest-houses, a Salvation Army hostel, an empty telegraph office, a raised bungalow, the deck of a riverboat, in a courthouse & cathouse.

At the airport we reminisced about the time our tandem-vans had met up at a plaza on the Indiana Toll Road, when Tom reported that, although his chauffeur had been awake for more than twenty-four hours, “He’s been snatching some sleep.” Surely we recalled climbing the mast in the dark as the rigging vibrated and flapped loudly. And awakening in that bus stop next to a Parisian *clochard* who pulled up his shirt to reveal a scar from The War.

Now a waitress marched across the carpet, her heels rapidly thudding across the carpet. “Tom! *That sound!* I thought we were at the White House Hotel in North Wales!”



The past now in the bank, Tom had made financial preparation for the future:

“In place of film in my camera, I stuffed it full of large-denomination notes of Indonesian currency, as black-market currency in Singapore gave me about fifty times the government rate. I was able to change only a bit officially but was able to live large on my smuggling.”

Our parting was jovial, mellow, and beery. Once again I thanked him for up-and-volunteering to salvage my plans, which had tumbled out of an unused backpack. Then I watched as the mustachioed one, even tanner after a jaunt to the beach, sporting head-armor as well as the always-gray trousers—always a match for the gray socks and now cut off into walking-shorts—strode toward the equator.

Scripture 27

Oprichting van Kabinet

Did He Who Made the Purple-Spotted Gudgeon Make Thee? (1)

Curator: Welcome to Amsterdam, sir. And to the Oprichting van Kabinet—the Cabinet of Creation.

Author: Thank you, Meneer Seba. [They shake hands]

Curator: You might be interested to know that I am Albert Seba the Tenth. The original Albert lived in the seventeen-hundreds.

Author: And I am indeed honored. I crossed the ocean to Amsterdam—like the Albert’s creatures—but they didn’t have jet-lag.

Curator: No problem for sailors, either, even though they were alive. As you know, they would sell my ancestor odd creatures from around the world. For guilders.

Author: So what happened to the Cabinets of Oddities?

Curator: If you don’t mind, we prefer “Curiosities.” It’s less—less—

Author: Anthropocentric, I would guess.

Curator: Yes.

Author: However, today I hope to experiment with Homo Sapiens. We are one of the most varied phenomena on earth. Ethnic groups, you know, individual personalities. So as I wrote to you from the U.S.A., I want to make a person. To be on the creating end of Plentitude.

[Silence]

Curator: Anyway, instead of genes, or God’s hand, we have our own fingers—to rifle through index cards of attributes.

Author: Probably “ruffle.”

Curator: Each drawer holds about 600 3 X 5s. With tabs at random intervals for subjects and subdivisions.

Author: But—where did the original collection go?

Curator: To the Ark Park.

Author: Excuse me?

Curator: In Kentucky—USA.

Author: Hmm.... Never heard of it, and sort of glad.

Curator: Yes, the centerpiece was a vessel of many cubits. The owners then ironically destroyed the sea-borne collection.

Author: What?! Destroyed?!

Curator: Yes, in a bonfire. As a sacrifice.

[Silence]

Author: No! When was that?

Curator: The sixth of June, 1966. Lots of sixes. Not long afterward the owners had big, shiny effigies fastened to the deck.

Author: Of....

Curator: Elephants, for one thing. They raised their trumps against the sky.

Author: Trunks.

Curator: Giraffes, tigers, dogs *groot* and *klein*.

Author: Bats?

Curator: There was one imitation mammoth, propped next to a cow. They called it Woolly Willy.

Author: I suppose that God was saving it for extinction. Anyway, did something happen to the ark?

Curator: Plastic, lightning.

[Silence]

Author: Was—was there—

Curator: I did find a single remainder when I was dusting the back corner of a shelf.

Author: That being....?

Curator: The hoof of a *Hapax legomenon*.

[Silence]

Author: Where is it now?

Curator: Doorstop.

[Silence]

Author: Anyway, I'm writing a book—

Curator: Oh, congratulations. What is it called?

Author: "Angel in Goggles."

Curator: "Angels—"

Author: "Angel. Just one." "In Goggles."

[Silence]

Curator: “Goggles.”

Author: Not important.

Curator: [Smiling] *Ik begrijp het niet*. But down at the Coffeeshop Oost they will understand.

Author: I mean, there’s no ultimate eternal reality—good or evil. Just endless variety. You know...quarks.

Curator: [Chuckling] I don’t recall seeing any of those specimens.

Author: Your ancestor’s cabinets—where did you find these old-time library catalogues?

Curator: From the Ets Hiam—the Jewish *Library*.

Author: But why did the library give them up?

[Silence]

Curator: I guess you could say—a decline of cardholders.

[Silence]

Author: Anyway, it’s human beings I’m interested in. Each of us seems to be a combination of whatevers—inborn or after-market, so to speak.

Curator: After-market?

Author: A metaphor. Circumstances after birth.

Curator: Each human component—no, that’s a mechanical word—seems to come out of a grasp bag.

Author: Indeed, a grab bag. So I’m asking you to build a person with me.

Curator: *Ja*, although without a body. No forehead-pins and stitches like in the movie. Just words.

Author: Like my book.

Curator: Yes, but from words on cards. All in English.

Author: This half-acre of them—they remind me of the Library of Congress, in Washington, D.C. Once I did a little research there on Icarus.

Curator: *Helaas!* No wings here anymore, wax or not.

Author: So no angels.

Curator: [Furrows brow] Was it “Googles”?

Author: “Goggles.”

Curator: Anyway just people—but also pretend-real.

Author: [Smiles] Lego Folks.

Curator: Oh, no! They come to life without a model, no instructions. We just reach in and pull out—as you say, whatever.

Author: I'd like to build someone—not of my personality but—in like circumstances.

Curator: So no Maori, or Mexican.

Author: No, just 'Merican. I'd feel more comfortable with white male over 60.

Curator: We'll have to move into another room. This way, please. [They walk]

Ah, the drawer "Gender."

Author: Hmmm—more cards than I expected. And all in color. What's this hue, would you say?

Curator: Periwinkle?

Author: Like Rip Van? Any connection?

Curator: One of our *kernels*? He was certainly put together with words.

Author: I'm going to have to peek and draw out from "Male."

Curator: All right, but only one *bedriegen* per session. By the way, this is where a gigantic spider was kept. She didn't have to shave her legs to catch a man.

Author: I'll be on the lookout. We have "Male," so how about "Race." Where is it?

Curator: Well, since there's only one, the human race, I labeled a drawer "Color—Ethnic," 51-B.

Author: [Muses] Still, hard not to be—to have a mindset that's not anthropocentric.

Curator: Hmm. Would that be a challenge for your book?

Author: Good point. But "*Angel*" pretty much focuses on Planet Earth.

Curator: [Smiling] Randall, so you won't leave out my ancestor!

Author: Or his goat with two heads and one body.

Curator: Actually the opposite.

Author: Well, let's return to our task. Sorry, I had to peek and then draw "Caucasian."

Curator: I didn't see you. I'll look and choose "Over 60."

Author: Now a particular detail—such as "Employment"?

Curator: Do you mean if he's working or not?

Author: No, Bert—more like what he does for a living 'n stuff.

Curator: Here goes: "Shepherd."

Author: Mind if I reach in again? "Accountant." Wait, here's "Retired Police Officer."

Curator: Let's have a look at a subdivision. Here's "Special Training."

Author: Shall we pull out one of the specifics?

Curator: “Body recovery”! [Silence]

Author: Shall we quit here?

Curator: Hmmm. Against my best judgment, I pursue. [Reads] “Overturned tour boat in Lake George.” [Silence] Where’s that?

Author: I don’t guess it much matters.

Curator: Randall, I could puff some dank.

Author: Some *what*?

Curator: It’s the best. Shall we move on to some other aspect of our handiwork?

Author: [Sings] “My guy—talkin’ about my guy.” How about “Physical description”?

Curator: *Zeker*. Let’s move over to #341. Fourth box from the left, bottom row.

Author: What’s this? “Wears black brace on wrist.

Curator: So it *is* handiwork. We might as well explore the reasons for elastics.

Author: Sorry, I did catch a glimpse—“Tennis,” “Arthritis.... Lessee—out comes this one: “Fall.”

Curator:—Here we go....

Author: [Reads] “Fire truck.”

[Silence]

[Then both at once]

Curator: “*You* picked that card, right?”

Author: “Is that what it says?”

Curator: Why don’t we drop this and look again for—basic—physical traits?

Author: I don’t mind circling back find one.

Curator: “Allergic to alcohol.”

Author: Huh? Never heard of it.

Curator: Not the best limitation, social or medical.

Author: Why don’t we give up on that. Maybe take a risk on “Quotations.”

Curator: It’s ‘way over there. [They walk past a dozen cabinets] How ‘bout this one. [Hands it to Author]

Curator: What?! “Hitler actually did some good things.”

[They glance at each other]

Author: Bert, what's happening?

Curator: It took God some practice before he got to Mankind. You know, oceans and birds.

Author: Let's give him another chance. Y'know what I'm sayin'?

Curator: Well, I'll do some deep finger-nailing. Is that an English word? Anyway, here it is: "I hate San Francisco!"

[Silence]

Author: I was going to suggest "Temperament" but—

Curator: I don't mind. Won't blister my fingers Drawer 16-D, I believe—how about "Lets no opportunity pass to help others."

Author: [Chuckles] Build a softer Führer.

Curator: Let's press our luck with another trait. [Averts gaze, draws out card] "Laughs."

Author: Well, nice to know, but everybody does. Is there a card for "Specifics"?

Curator: I couldn't help noticing—there's no end to them: "Chortle," "Smothered," "Snicker"—

Author: [Interrupts] "I'll just grab one. Here it is: "Loud."

Curator: Pretty generic. I bet that one has a few sub-heading cards.

Author: Yep. How bout "Often just this side of manic."

[Silence]

Curator: Well, we're getting to know this fellow.

Author: Wait: here's one folded at the back. [Takes a second to decipher it] "During Zumba session, yells out *Ba Ba Ba Ba Ba* in "Sweet Caroline."

[Silence]

Curator: My job is never the "Same old similar."

Author: "Same ol' same ol'." Bert, what time is it? I'm beat.

Curator: You could use a few tokes, just like Rip.

Author: Why?

Curator: Would have kept him awake. No search for a long-dead *hond*.

Author: [Muses] "Pets"—I wonder if our fellow has one.

Curator: [Guiding him on a walk] I'll open drawer 243-G and you can reach in.

Author: "Dog." Well, no surprise. Let me check a sub-div: "Owns three."

Curator: Hmmm. Probably German Shepherds.

Author: We could flip over to Names.

Curator: You mean like Zoon or Hondje? Why not “Duchess”—you know, in honor of The Netherlands.

Author: [Ignores or misses the reference.] No, Bert, the *species*, the *type*—like Golden Retriever.

Curator: [Reads] “Two Chihuahuas and a Chipper.”

Author: A what?

[Silence]

Curator: There’s one specific card. Are you brave enough?

Author: [Reads] “*Wheels them around in a carriage.*”

[Silence]

Author: What time is it, Bert? As for my own identity, it’s still somewhere over the Atlantic.”

Curator: Shall we bother to find a name for this coppled up creature?

Author: Actually “cobbled.” Before we quit, we might at least make him more—you know, corporeal.

Curator: Let’s try “Body Types.”—living ones, of course. Will you read this?

Author: “Mesomorph.” What’s that? Not helpful, but here’s a subdivision in English, at least, not Latin. [Thumbs through cards] “Wiry.”

Curator: Hmm. Let’s circle back to Temperament.” Give him a physical dimension.

Author: Like giving a body to an abstraction, you know, what a morality play does.

Curator: Uh-huh. Here’s one: “Upbeat, energetic, sleeps little.”

Curator: Now we’re getting somewhere. Let’s circle back to “Appearance.”

Author: I’ll—“Wrap-around sunglasses.”

Curator: I don’t understand. How shall we explain this?

Author: Maybe an injury?

Curator: I’ll be back. [Walks to another catalog, shoes sounding along the floor, rads aloud] “Eye injuries requiring sunglasses.”

Author: I couldn’t help noting others—“Baseball,” “Exploding Can in Incinerator.....”

Curator: “Police baton during practice.”

[Silence]

Author: We have created a fireman-policeman, a body-fetcher, and a poodle-pusher.

Curator: Chihuahua, I think. Randall, I wonder —have we have fashioned—well, a Curiosity?

Author: [Musing, smiles] Like an angel who wears goggles!

Curator: I thought they were spectacles.

Author: [Shakes head] Uh uh—you know, for flying.

[Silence]

Curator: Anyway, I just don't feel right about the dogs.

Author: Yes, more likely he would have big growlers.

Curator: Or body-sniffers.

Author: Aren't all dogs like that?

Curator: I mean corpses. Should we try to pin down a source for them?

Author: The bodies? Sorry, I'm tired.

Curator: No, the pets.

Author: Sure, go ahead.

Curator: Let's walk—and take a left here. [Footsteps echo]

Author: Nice shiny-white knobs. Ivory?

Curator: Woolly Mammoth. Here's the drawer and the tab: "Reasons," etc.

Author: "To please children," "To hunt varmints—"

Curator: Be sure not to read the cards first, just stay random.

Author: OK. [Draws] "Belonged to spouse."

Curator: Cheat or no cheat in the draw, we should use this one.

Author: OK, Bert. Why don't we get together tomorrow. And try for less—incongruity.

Curator: Someone more like you or me. [They briefly glance at each other]

Author: All these three-by-five cards—they make me wonder if people are dealt hands, like in a card game.

Curator: Perhaps, Randall. If so, I may be more like a dealer than a creator. I will get myself a hat with a green—a green—

Author: Visor. I'll challenge you with a related question: Was Man made in the image of God?

[Silence, then they smile and shake hands]

Curator: Why don't you come back tomorrow and we'll create an Eve.

NOTE

Derek Hall, Amy-Jane Beer, and Daniel Gilpin. *The World Encyclopedia of Fish & Shellfish & Other Aquatic Creatures*. UK: Lorenz, 2002. Imprint of Anness Publishing Limited. P. 465.

Scripture 28

The Estate VI: The Bat. "AACK!"

Humans can make singing chipmunks, but only God can make flying mammals.

Whoever secures cubit to cubit, and then attaches the structure to a ridge, might provide shelter for bats. These are anatomy-straddlers of the order Chiroptera, Greek for “hand-wing.” Someone explained that they need a high place from which to take off so they can sink while getting to get lift. Over our bedroom ceiling came a scuffling that unnerved us, unlike the one-at-a-time evening forays over the deck. So even though the animals were otherwise harmless and consumed insect pests—we had never seen a mosquito—we hired exterminators to ameliorate the situation.

Workers attached a slack net to a crevice under a window, so when the bats crawled down, they couldn't return, like the proverbial umbrella that can't go Down the chimney Up. The company also tested bugs that lay near our bathroom window, mainly dead but a few dying, a species that ignores humans yet plagues bats, one of nature's ironies.

Yet the wingers somehow found new crevices and resumed their nightly hunt. We couldn't try to seal off the ingresses in the daytime while the animals were sleeping—like the fatal bat cave in *Tom Sawyer*, where Injun Joe's skeleton joined those of hand-wings. Joe probably gave little mind to the Biblical prohibition against eating bats, one of the “unclean birds.” (Leviticus 11:13, Deuteronomy 14:18.) “Next year,” we vowed, and continued to sweep little beads of guano from the deck. Our neighbors gave us a bat house, which was set on a high pole by our right-hand women, Faith King of the Marmon and Kathleen Becker. This refuge was ignored, however, despite the bat lure applied as I tried to keep my balance near the top of a ladder.

The next spring our two fixit-friends drove ladders and tools up Annie Lane and gave new meaning to “batten down.” Declared Faith: “The house was built like a sponge, with all these little pores that were happy bat havens.” She and Kathleen pulled all the wooden trim, which had given each window or door 5½ inches of space. They sawed a kerf 1½ inches deep into each log, then inserted a piece of metal. “It's the little curvy part that they really like”—i.e., where the convex logs taper together to form a shallow place. “Leaves a little tunnel for them.” While removing a fake roof-vent, they came upon a denizen: “Kathleen screamed like a little girl.” But the most unpleasant phase was taking off the old boards while Kathleen accumulated guano in her hair. On another visit they dismantled the top ridge and replaced it with a Z-bar.

The next year we seemed to reach equilibrium with all wings bright and beautiful. But one night in July I climbed the stairs from the basement, opened the door, and recoiled from a black circling. Around and around the living room they swooped, and I could even feel the air as one of them neared. The tiny dark bodies were doubled by flitting and dipping shadows. When I retreated to warn Marge about the invasion, we tried to limit fear with logic—remember, they don't bite—yet how did they get in and how would they get out?

Marge ran upstairs and quickly shut the doors to the other rooms and to our bedroom on the top floor. I hastened to the computer and learned that we could leave open external doors and turn on outside lights. Marge then handed me an extendable mop, which I shook and swung from the balcony over the living room to urge the spooks to descend from the cathedral ceiling. Most of them did, but to dislodge one on the frame of a high triangular window I had to set a step-stool on the ground floor, reach up with the mop and pound the wooden frame.

Scrutinizing the room again, I saw no means of entry, no crevice or hole. Never had the bats made any incursion other than into the eaves and around the outside of windows. We did remember seeing them, however, as they flitted around the top of the wood-stove flue. Hmmm. Now looking at the iron appliance itself, I noticed that the brass-framed door was slightly ajar. “Why?” wondered Marge—a question that triggered the memory of Sidney’s little brother Julien as he curiously worked the brass handle up and down.

We surmised that the creatures had made their way down the flue into the stove and then out.

Next day another gyre, this time by a lone invader. So much for our theory that the stove was the mode of entry, so our apprehension returned about an unfortified home. Then the bat disappeared. Mop in hand, I eyeballed other rooms and spotted a small bulk hanging from the top of a curtain and scratching to keep its hold. I found a plastic cover for microwave dishes, and—that creature sitting on a fancy pillow, *Slam!* The cushion became the bottom half of a trap, which in turn I carried outside, letting the confused bat fly off, but only after it scritchted again so as to keep its perch on the pillow. Stove-theory reinstated, for the bat had evidently spent the night in the house.

Next day digit-flapper materialized upstairs. I was unable to catch it despite an awkward effort of mop, microwave, and loud oath as my prey made a nasty thin threatening noise. It flew to the ground floor and sat near the front door, probably tired and hungry. By the time I got there with my plastic *Gotcha!* it had escaped via the open door of the screened porch. Sometime during this siege-from-within, Marge shut the bedroom door, relieved, turned around to stare into a pair of eyes hanging just above the door: “*AACK!*”

Faith and Kathleen drove over to case out the problem from the vantage point of the deck. With the help of binoculars they spied a bat that was frantically trying to free its leg, caught between sheet metal plates at the apex of the roof, by gnawing it off.

Mortality continued quickly when we built a one-newspaper-page fire to encourage the bats to hustle out of the flue-top. I didn’t realize that bats were so far down in the pipe, and a couple of them dropped onto the firebrick and flailed around. Too late to apologize as one body lay there like a giant grasshopper.



Cabin logs, 11” top-to-bottom,
curved on the outside,
flat on the inside.



This whole experience of flying, perching, and falling mammals began to distort our perception:

- * When a hawk flew past the transparent triangle, I shrank like a mouse.
- * In the evening when I walked onto the porch and saw a hanging black shape, I flinched at what I made out to be the base of a pull-chain.
- * From the bedroom a slight clanking downstairs meant that the enemy was making an assault through the pipe—before I realized it was a pan-lid that had slipped on a shelf.
- * When I shut the door of a downstairs bedroom to conduct another inspection, I caught my breath as an ebony shape attached to the door resolved into a metal dragonfly.
- * When Marge thought she was witnessing the shape and shadow of another bat, she realized that it was an illusion—until it did materialize wing by claw as another overstayed-guest.
- * When I surveyed the pine ceiling and beams, every knothole looked faintly sinister.
- * When I bumped into our front-door decoration and knocked it to the floor—a metal salamander or whatever—I was unenthusiastic about reaffixing another creature.
- * When I removed the top of the coffee grinder, the flanges that rotate to scrape out the residue became three spindly legs.
- * When Marge and I unfolded Julien’s Pack & Play for a visit, I almost jumped back at its sets of articulating side-wings.
- * Lying in bed near-sighted, I blinked at a dark round shape over the door, which I slowly recognized as the chain-pull for the light and fan.



- * That dark shape lying on the side of a stair-tread—oh, the cover of a cell phone.

Early the next summer we heard and saw a few bats, not sure if the small number reflected the tightened house or, over the winter, a penetrated cave to the south. Because a fungus called “white nose syndrome” kills hibernating bats by infecting their skin.

One rainy night, however, there was a very lively commotion in the ridge cap. Perhaps a new contingent had landed, maybe a second one that fought it out with an earlier one? Or had a predator made its way through the defenseless crowd? Thump, scratch, flutter right over our heads. The noise upset us even more because we had just returned from seeing a movie called *The House of Good and Evil* (2013) (1), a psychological thriller shot in Floyd County, and needed no further sound effects. Both of us, keyed up and a bit despondent, partly because we

couldn't seal up the space for reasons legal and ethical, took a sleeping pill. Next night, soundless.

From outside, Marjory did see a couple of bats emerge from a crack at places where metal attached to metal or wood. Now a few dark shapes appeared, one on the porch screen, a couple on the stone facing and on the support beams that held the deck over the carport. One seemed to die on the Trex composite, but the next day had found a place to hang out. Each bat resembled a cooked chicken-back with rubber-band appendages. A close inspection, however, revealed a slight inhaling and exhaling.

Now one clung face downward to the inside of the porch screen. Marjory and I figured out a way to transport it, same as I had used with a wasp or two: by clamping a transparent plastic bowl over and slowly running a file-folder under it. The highest pitch audible by humans issued from a tiny mouth opened to bite. Legs scrambled either to dodge the bowl or extricate themselves from the screen. Holding the trap closed, I opened it over the deck and tossed the animal up in the air. Descending, it opened wings and stuck out a leg (as if in an animated cartoon), which grabbed a blade of yard-high grass and bowed it down. I threw away the widdled-on folder. At the arrival of cool weather, the throng disappeared. We hired someone to fasten a screen to the rooftop-opening of the flue, so that if the bats ever returned, they would encounter a barricade.

The unwanted, sad, and at times gruesome collision between what Aquinas might call “creatures” differed from the problematic relationship between humans and dogs. The hand-wings needed only our unused cracks & crannies for shelter, nothing for food. They made noise only for the practical needs of shelter and defense. We did not neglect or treat them cruelly, at least on purpose. We did not vaunt them over other humans as threats, objects of affection or tokens of property. Although not fond of the hybrids, we appreciated their cocktail-hour forays.

I wondered how Noah had dealt with his onboard creatures (Genesis 6: 11-16). “Make thee an ark of gopher wood,” ordered God. *The Floating Gopher*: have it resemble the Cabin? Not that much, for if a cubit is roughly twenty inches, it must have extended about twelve times the length the Wells house—500 feet, almost as long as the *Marco Polo*. And the vessel was not made of pine logs. And it was “Covered inside and out with pitch,” which would be a violation of neighborhood standards. Yet similarities exist. “Make it with bottom, second, and third decks”—so there’s the Cabin’s basement, ground floor (its main room high enough to accommodate a pair of giraffes), and top half-floor, a bedroom suite. “Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top.” There’s the triangular-vitreous moon-observatory. Did Noah invite a pair of bats “among every winged thing?” Or did they crash the Ark Party?

“In the Bible, bats are culturally and spiritually associated with darkness, uncleanness and desolation” (AI). Do real secular humanists still scritch in the attics of believers?

NOTE

1. Directed by David Man and written by Blu de Golyer, 2013.

Scripture 29

D & M VIII: A Plenitresury

God bless you, dear.

Suppose that we move from Miss Faith Desrie in Scripture 21, with its exposé of the Criminal, to an inventory of the Chthonic. Please keep in mind this *Angel Axiom*: the essence of the world is its endless and transitory distinctions, infinitely interstitial, good or bad. Not any unified, beneficent and eternal force.

Question 1. Whether language illustrate D & M.

Either spoken or written—Latin, English, or Akkadian—features of language demand more than a few thoughts. So without further adieu:

A. Word Blends—any example is traditionally called a *portmanteau* (a large trunk):

- * **Person whose death enabled one's birth:** *diegenitor*. The first husband of my grandmother succumbed to pneumonia. His successor was G.H. Capps, Jr., who became my grandfather. His own father, G.H. Capps, Sr. (husband of Sophia) took his wallet to heaven. So his granddaughter, Betty Jane Capps, had to leave Lawrence College after a year, returned to Oak Park, and met the dashing Dudley.
- * **Driver's inattentive lag at a stoplight:** (1) *nap-light*. (2) *honk-me*. (3) *green queen*.
- * **A rightly-cautious lag:** *pre-boned*.
- * **Petscrement:** *chien chit*.
- * **Indiscriminate aerial attack:** *bombapalooza*. (E.g., Israel's *Tikkun olum*, "Stick it to 'um.'")
- * **Hamassacre:** *wholesale killing by subterranean, self-created entities*.
- * **Suicide bomber:** *murtyr*.
- * **Music too painful to hear:** *tragitune*. At a second-marriage celebration I was on the dance floor with the bride when she clutched my arm: "Stop." She guided me away to "Daddy's Little Girl" (1949), special to her late husband and his tragically late daughter.
- * **To disparage someone who has just left:** *post mort-'em*.
- * **Sleep apnea with complex pitches:** *snorchestra*.
- * **To talk with the mouth full:** *masticulate*.
- * **A country becoming trash:** *garbination*.
- * **Distracting remnant of the original version:** *detwritus*. (Works to the eye, not the ear.)

- * **Actual British musical group:** *The Mozartists*.
- * **Combination of hydrogen and ocean:** *hycean*. “(Astronomers Detect a Possible Signature of Life on a Distant Planet.” NYT 19 April 2025, p. A16.)
- * **Extreme ambivalence:** *Appreci-hate*. (Mellissa Whittingham.)
- * **Vehicle driven by Dr. Mohs:** *cancervertible*.
- * **A fart during yoga:** *gasena*.
- * **Playful nickname for one Bronx native who taught Latin dance:** *Jew-rican*.
- * **Former spouse:** *wasband*. (Credit R.A.L.)
- * **Slaughtermelon:** blowwied per *Garden & Gun* magazine.

B. Word Gems.

Memory of a last thing: *termimnemonic*. Ralph Roe grew up in Lebanon, New York, then moved to Solsville in 1948, where the O & W (Ontario and Western Railroad) operated daily. The train with tank cars ran alongside the milk station, piped over the chilled milk, and delivered it to the processing plant about 20 miles away (a facility that made bottled milk, powdered milk and cheese). “I observed the last coal-burner on the track, then the next day its new-technology-replacement, a Diesel engine, c.1951.”

Homophones: “Speak now or forever hold your piece”—appropriate at the wedding of Henry Coy and Grace Martin, which ended a “shot & shell” feud between two families.(Song by Ted Weems and Al Cameron, 1936.)

Ambiguous wording:

- * *12 p.m.* Clear: “12 noon” or “midnight.”
- * *NO CHILDREN IN BASKET*. Grocery store information or directive.
- * “*Take a stab at free speech*.” Interpretation subjective.
- * “*Appalachian Spring*”. Title refers not to a season but to a communal source of water.

Games played at the Dyslexia Club: *Bnigo*, *Scarbble*, *Nomopoly*, and *ONU*. The author became a member after his reading disability was pointed out by an alert soldier.

Garbled transcriptions:

- * *Telephone call*: “Hey, Reynolds. Chris Large about 10 o’clock too Jim.” Translation: “Hi, Randall. Chris Marge about 10 o’clock to gym.”
- * *Zoom meeting in progress*: “Make your church comfortable from floor to rapper.”

The primal curse: “God damn it!” Both inflexible and elastic, a verbal gun. Incitements range from the annoying to the catastrophic. E.g., from a shopper letting an avocado drop onto the floor to a pilot taking off through dense fog only to see another Boeing 747 on the tarmac. “*Godverdomme!*”

Mis-heards:

- * In about 1926, a group of businessmen in Glen Ellyn debated on whether a *Mr. Katz* should open a business— George H. Capps, Jr.. (Source: city father sixty years later.)
- * For Randall, who is a bit hard of hearing, *Shanti Temple* becomes *chaunchy pimple*. *Masks and fans* (strange equipment for an exercise class) become corrected to *mats and bands*. At a motel registration desk he was aghast: “*Free porn!?*” Clerk, bursting into laughter: “*Free form!*”

Nonverbal behavior while talking on cell phone, invisible to the interlocutor: facial expressions, gestures of hand and arm, motions of head, torso, and legs if standing. Two or more behaviors usually join.

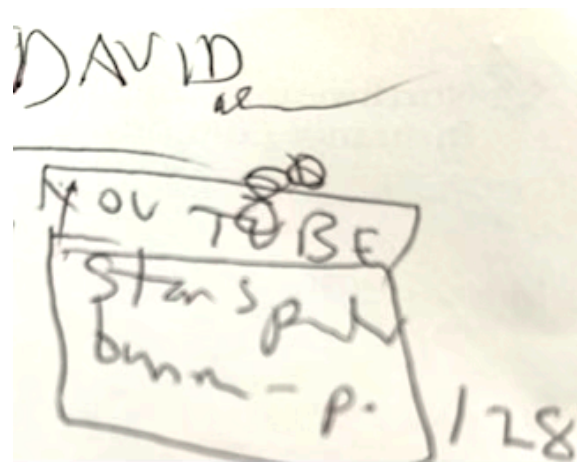
Potential Words: one neologism is the verb “to Duffill,” created after a train left Mr. Duffill on the platform. (Paul Theroux, *The Great Railway Bazaar*. Penguin, 1977, p. 21.)

Illegible notes: (photo):

Names of Streets and Subdivisions: (1) After the nature displaced by that same development: e.g., the Arboretum (mall); and Quail Creek, where Randall and Marjory evicted the last bobwhites. (2) Whilst others name them after British-sounding words—a whole *Wick-ipedia* of them.

Acronyms: *ORCOP: Orange County Press Club. Its lower-case version names a village in England, Orcop.

- * HAMAS: **H**ow **A**llah **M**ercifully **A**mbushes **S**chmucks.



Clumsy writing: To be avoided only by not writing. Risk is lessened by instruction (rare), practice and revision. “Dive into a tapestry of genuine experiences.” ”Nestled away from the hustle and bustle (and traffic).” “*The Royal Princess*,” on the hull of a cruise ship, maybe to distinguish it from *The Commoner Princess* or *The Royal Pain*. Effective writing depends on the context, so perhaps what doesn’t work for a scholarly paper does for biz. A conventional piece of writing that may satisfy only a committee is the stuffed-sentence *mission statement*:

Angel in Goggles: Secular Scriptures advances a divinity-free-driven view of life that, after considerably warning away believers, encourages freethinkers (while acknowledging their own forfeiture) by means of a compilation inspired by the Bible’s diversity of books—yet by a secular canon that explores the earth via a variety of forms and perspectives, into which parameters it incorporates a serial treatise, enhanced by photographs, attesting to the world’s plenitude.

As dense as a mathematical formulation, this example enlists about the same number of words as The Lord’s Prayer in English. But the latter stops seven times before “Amen” to give emphasis and allow sink-in time.

Song Lyrics: They may replace invention with repetition. Paul McCartney's phrase "Simply having a wonderful Christmas time" is repeated 17 times (with slight variations). A song invoked earlier in *Angel* repeats "coconut" 28 times; and another repeats "Guantanamo" 32-times for 160 syllables.

Spoonerisms: One time the author, fed up with the amateur-hour quality of the college's radio station, tried out as a DJ. After playing a record, he heard himself say "That was Perth Faice," returned the needle, and slipped out.

Tongue-Twisters: You can say them aloud for entertainment: "False press pass." "Complete the claim kit." "Passive elasticity."

- * Some combinations challenge a singer, like "Two pistols strapped around her body." Randall, before playing "Darlin' Cory" on the guitar, locates a comfortable pitch for his vocal range. Then he settles on a tempo for pistols & syllables, a pace that constrains the entire ditty and thus avoids a slow-down.
- * Technical style, with its minimal ratio of signal (word) per information. "Radiographs of the left femur demonstrate no displacement of fracture hardware compared to previous radiographs with increased callus formation status post cephalomedullary nail fixation of reverse obliquity intertrochanteric proximal femur fracture."

Mnemonic Devices: For example, to remember the nine-rhyme scheme of Spenserian stanza, ABABBCBCC: "Ah (Southern pronunciation of the pronoun I) **B**et **A**h **B**etter **B**e **C**areful **B**e **C**ause **C**onfusing."

Similar-Sounders: *Flaunt-flout*. Would a funerary funicular be fungible for all in Tents and Porpoises? One sinner was sentenced to Haiti rather than Hades, or vice versa. A Speedo with flag-print: *Star-Spangled Banana*.

Random Utterances: Language resembles a piano, both of them fixed systems that allow unpredictable, unique creations. Phoneme after phoneme returns to oblivion even as it's sounded or read. Examples in *Angel*: "When are we going?" "C'mon," "Can't you read that?!" "Randy, can you believe this?!" "Erzerum Coming!" "Whose dog is that?" "It's full of books."

Overheard:

- * “The **L** fell off of [**LUND** sign on the wall] and broke a woman’s arm.”
- * “All my Cuban friends have freckles.”
- * “My dog Honey threw up last night. I was sad.”
- * My dog ate my sister’s underwear & had to have surgery.
- * “I haven’t slept well the past few nights. I lost a cat to coyotes.”
- * “I have a colonoscopy tomorrow.”
- * “I had a proto-theological discussion with my nephew that almost ended in a dust-up.”
- * “Do you remember—down at the Ice House—was there a smell of ammonia?” (T. Hollinger.)
- * “You’re the male version of my grandma.”
- * “You’re the white grandfather I wish I had.”
Michma (photograph) “I remember my first conscious memory. I was about four years old and I was spread out on the bed sleeping. I remember waking up with [makes the sound *shhhh*] with such—shock! Sweating profusely. It was a hot day. Thinking—it wasn’t like “Where am I?”—it was more like ‘Whoa!—I’m on this bed—somebody put me on this bed.’ I was able to retain information and retrieve it.”
- * Seventy-six-year-old African American woman: “Lots of times in the middle of the night I have to get up and go to writing” (lyrics for Christian songs).



You might spend an hour (as did the author) hearing random particulars:

- * “Are you Stuart?” (Asked by a delivery person.)
- * “The only bad thing—when Jag was bought by Ford, they did away with that body style.”
- * “I had a hamburger pin.” (as a McDonald’s worker).
- * “I took out all the Xs and Zs [in Scrabble] so he would win.”
- * “I brought back the lid to the marmalade jar.”
- * “I asked my dad, ‘Is something wrong with my dog? She runs up and likes to lick.’ ‘No, she likes the salt.’”
- * “I buttoned the khakis” (in a laundry on a military base).

Question 2. Whether there be Wh-interrogatives.

What if?

Suppose Miss Faith Desrie is actually Mr. Abidemi Abimola.

What if in the sense of an alternate past event? What if Mr. Pepper had flunked out of medical school. Examples are abundant in *What if: Book of Alternative History* (UK:Future Publishing Limited, 12th ed., 2023). Suppose the slave states had won, the Vikings had colonized North America, the Beatles had never formed. Each of these courses would have led to other hypothetical events—each of which would follow suit.

So the series would be fractal: a never-ending pattern by which similar shapes repeat themselves at different scales. Think of a tree: its main branches fan out to make identical but smaller ones, which in turn repeat the shape down to the twigs. Life's Could-Haves never stop proliferating but create a *fractalsmagoria*. What if the singer had found his thrill on Blueberry Mountain? What if the canal boater's mule was Stephanie? What if the closest thing to a *Midnight Special* was the 10:45?

A sad example:

In high school one person's boyfriend helped her overcome shyness. But she moved to the city while he stayed in the little town. When she wished him a happy birthday, he asked to reconnect, but she didn't, and he soon died in a car-wreck. So she must play "What if" with his ghost. (Mary J. Ennis. *New York Times*, 14 February 2025, p. A12.)

A positive instance, one vital to this book: What if Tom had asked Randy "When are you going?" And what if a person could go back and change a decision—for the author, it would involve a the handle of a bookcase or snow shovel. Many repenting unbelievers or miscreants might avoid the sinner-sizzle.

Instead of fire, what if hell is this gorgeous view (at right) but without sound or motion—the sun forever peeping or sleeping. What if you complain so Satan plays *Bolero* over and over? Or ditto "Simply Having a Wonderful Christmas Time"?



Which?

- * Landlord or tenant, which is worse? Of which number is the square root **2.64575131106**?
- * Mellissa—please help me remember which **W** starts your last name? Worthingham? Wickenham? Wythington? Whittingham? Wickenton? Wythingham?

Why?

- * “Why, Mr. Grinch?” (Cindy Lou.) And why does he own a dog? Why does the 1966 animated film, “*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*,” not credit the singer?
- * Why do Indian men have this obsessive and borderline unhealthy relationship with flip flops?
[reddit.com/r/AskIndia/comments/1ch14hk/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskIndia/comments/1ch14hk/)
- * Why does the film *Something about Mary* seem as juvenile the third time?
- * Why do adults have hair on their pits & parts?
- * Why is *how* not spelled *whow*?
- * If a tree falls in the woods, why does it switch from *tall* to *long*?
- * Why do we never hear of the partial Schmo?
- * Why did the enclosed edible seed of the plant *Arachis hypogaea* family rest supported by the buttocks of its pod on a bar of metal fixed horizontally to enable the locomotion of a self-propelled concatenation of rolling stock?

What? What is “the chase” that one cuts to? Customer: “What’s the Soup du Jour?” Server: “That’s the soup of the day.” On the *Nova Scotia*, what possessed Randy to remove some kind of tube from a fire-fighting cabinet and walk around playing like a trumpet? (Hint: not the ginger beer mixer. This question was not asked by an officer who stood by the cabinet the next day.)

Who? Will be comin’ ‘round the mountain when she comes? Who ran over our dog Moonbeam? No doubt the person on his return from the Sunday evening visit to his elderly mother. No recrimination deserved.

Whom? Would you try to avoid in heaven? (“Well, lad—you won’t need that snow shovel.”)

When? Will there be a train between Los Angeles and San Francisco that won’t stop for a while and let a passenger get out to admire periwinkles waving in the ocean breeze?

Where? Where did the exotic specimens originate that were collected by Albertus Seba? (See below). “Where I know you at?” (“Where have I met you?”) “Where’s ya barn?” (“Where was you born?”) Where did Randall store those Akkadian tablets?

Question 3: Whether there be What-Nots.

Plenitude bottled: Albertus Seba kept jars and drawers of specimens in His Cabinet of Natural Curiosities. The Dutchman published a four-part *Thesaurus* that comprises: I. Plants and animals; II. Snakes; III. Marine Life; and IV. Insects. Beware the serpents: the flying snake, the nose-horned viper, and the common cobra—about 350 of these looped, self-wound, and intertwined creatures, short to long, skinny to plump, each a legless muscle rolled in a uniquely-patterned strip of wallpaper—all drawings of actual creatures that define and participate *Snake*.

Where in the world did these specimens originate? According to Seba's reports and his nomenclature:

America (vague referent), Ambon (Indonesian Island), Africa, Brazil, Ceylon, Surinam, Portugal, Nova Hispania, Siam, Arabia, Orient, Guinea, South Asia, Armenia, Martinique, Cuba, Bali, Cape of Good Hope, Guadeloupe, Japan, Celebes, St. Cruz, Mexico, India, Peru, Virginia, and Mauritania.

The compendium is partial to toads rather than frogs, which nevertheless cling to a page here and there: e.g., African varieties as well as "anatomy of a young frog that still has its tail." (*Cabinet*. pp. 194-96, 160, 323.) As a reminder of the Dutchman's secular values, this last specimen has nothing to do with augury-by-entrails. It ignores any theological questions of agent, purpose, means, material, and form (to adopt Aristotle's "causes,"), as does the whole Sebang.

Human faces in Things: Pareidolia (examples above).



"Hats off to you!"



Hooverudolph.

Pejoratively metonymous comestibles: E.g., "Frogs" (French people), "Krauts" (German), "Grits" (Southern Americans, white and rural).

Motions in religious rituals: Stand to praise, kneel to pray, sit to be instructed (Episcopalian tradition). Others: sway, raise hands to sky, pass the peace with hands or lips, dance, go rigid, fall down, draw knife across throat of cow or plunge it into human rib cage, pass the plate.

Reasons for Russia to be proud: Please check all that apply.

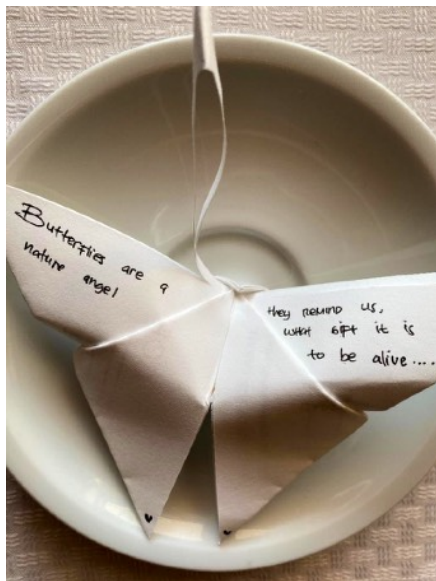
- (1) ☐ Did not persecute the gay Tchaikovsky.
- (2) ☐ NA.
- (3) ☐ NA.
- (4) ☐ NA.

Things that keep you awake: Ms. B-H, a hospice caregiver in the Bronx during the days of Covid: “Visions of dead people. Families not coming to see their loved one. Bodies moved to outside refrigerators.”

Causes of female deaths in folk songs: Please insert the corresponding number (alphabetical):

Clementine____
Darlin’ Cory____
Frankie____
Miss Mousie____
Molly Malone____
My love____
Polly Von (Vaughn)____

(1) Arrow. (2) A big black snake. (3) The Big Chair. (4) Drowning. (5) The fever. (6) Stabbing. (7) Unknown. **



Female voyages: Anggita, aboard the *Eurodam* of the Holland America Line, explained that she must leave her young son in Indonesia for eight months of the year. She fashioned this memento for Alice, who was celebrating her tenth birthday with grandparents:

*“Butterflies are a nature angel / they remind us,
what a gift it is to be alive.”*

Of course there are many reasons for females to undertake voyages. Yaikimi Velasquez, perhaps in her thirties, wrote the following travelogue in the author’s journal when she was working at a motel in Key West, Florida, 2003:

I met my father when I was 12 years old. I lived in Cuba in poverty. As a result when I was 19 years old I left Cuba with my daughter who was one year and 18 months old. In the crossing they caught us and I was in jail for 2 nights. When they let me out I had to walk 30 miles with my daughter in my arms all night long through a fog such that I couldn’t even see. Two days later I fled from Cuba hiding my daughter from her father and fleeing the regime of Castro. When I got on the boat, water was coming in and my daughter was vomiting and dehydrated, full of urine and more. The crossing was 2 days. My daughter only nursed and when we arrived she was sick. When I saw my father it was a beautiful experience. This is a very sad part of my life but I am free thanks to the United States. **(1)**

One-two-threes: E.g., First Impression, Second Chance, Third Strike.

Bragworthy connections: The author’s. (1) He met someone whose cousin had provided the voice of Siri. (2) His daughter Katie once danced up the aisle to a date with Aretha Franklin’s son (but her dad never got to say “Rethe & I”). (3) Her older friend met the Dalai Lama three times. (4) Randall’s son-in-law Mike used to deliver newspapers to a Nobel Laureate in Champaign,

Illinois. (5) His wife Marjory made eye contact with John F. Kennedy as he passed in a motorcade at the University of Wyoming.

Genetic-blends: Yes, people are created, but the agent is ancestry. Older than even the fig tree is the Fractal Family.



Collette, Randall, Marjory, Mellissa. Please write the person's name next to her or his partial genetic information:

1. About 50% "Russian" ([ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)). _____
2. Dutch grandmother and Cherokee great-grandmother. _____
3. Jamaican and English. _____
4. 1% Basque ([ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)). _____ ***

Stub-ends of railroad tracks:

Positive. E.g., in 2013, when the VIA train arrived from Toronto, the tracks led its backwards-roll to a buffer in Vancouver. Tom and Randall shared the ceremony from the former last car.

Neutral. They marked the end of the line from Istanbul in Western Turkey to Erzerum in Eastern.

Negative. (1) They stuck out twisted from a bridge. (2) They ended a one-way trip to Auschwitz for the wife of Ernie Lion and the mother of the seven Weber siblings. (*UnBroken*, film by Beth Lane, 2025.)

Most important invention: "The chain saw"—retired lumberman on the Olympic Peninsula. "The washing machine!"—sibling-mother of multiple children, born in the early 1900s.

Banjo jokes: (1) What's the definition of "perfect pitch"? When you toss a banjo into the dumpster and it doesn't hit a side. (2) I left a banjo in the back seat, forgot to lock my car, and returned to find three banjos. (3) How can you tell the difference between banjo tunes? By their names.

Relics lost to history:

A. *Roman Catholic saints*. (1) Canine tooth of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. (2) Finger with ring-shaped stigma of St. Catherine d' Ricci. (3) Noose of St. Pedro Armengol.

B. *Secular figures*. (1) Toe of Bob Marley. (2) Collar forced upon Lugalzagesi, King of Uruk, who was led to the gate of Enlil by Sargon, first ruler of the Akkadian Empire.

Facebook contacts: "Friend suggestions." Fractal-faces, business basis.

Things you're glad you didn't ask: "Are you pregnant?" "Is this your [parent]?" "Where's your [spouse]?" "How did _____ work out?" "Why do you wear that shabby oversized coat?" (Answer uncovered: to steal a ham from the A&P.)

Ingredients to read only after eating: "Folic acid, water, soybean and palm oil, sugar, hydrogenated palm oil, baking powder."

Health violations by restaurants:

From "Sanitation scores..." The *Charlotte Observer*, 6 April 2025, p. 12 A.

Dead bugs. Food dumped in handwashing sink. Cheese not cold enough, Raw meat stored above ready-to-eat morsel. Food-prep employees wearing no head-covering or wearing jewelry. Equipment needing repair. Food debris inside microwave and oven. Debris and grease on floors. Food stored on floor.

Exceptions to the rule: "You can't buy love." Yet if a child badly wants an electric arcade game, The Claw (with flashing LED lights and circus music), receives one as a gift, puts it together, and runs up to you with this news: "Grandpa, I won a prize!" At least love can be an investment.

Misused sayings and words: These originals have become misunderstood:

- * *The exception proves the rule*. "Prove" comes from the Latin word 'to test.' So just as probate court tests a will (validates it), the exception tests the precept.
- * *Tow the line* replaces the obedient metatarsals (toes) with a serviceable rope.
- * *The lion's share*—originally and wryly: the whole thing (lion gets *all*).
- * *Beg the question*. Now simply means that an assertion invites inquiry. The original in rhetorical theory: "Pleads for assent without bothering to provide evidence." The biting metaphor has been gummed.
- * "*The Road Less Traveled*." This is the title of a book by M. Scott Peck (1978) as well as a poem by Robert Frost. Peck and most everyone else understandably read it as a celebration of contrarian daring. Frost's speaker, however, slyly teases himself for seeking undeserved credit for taking a course that's not very different.
- * *The word "factoid"* originally meant "a pseudo fact"—compare "humanoid." Now it simply refers to a minor or curious fact, with the forfeit of astringent braininess. (See "Beg the Question.")

Animal-human gods:



Lord Ganesha. Courtesy Jane and Ken Cundiff.

Question 4: Whether Plenitude Admit the Roughly.

Other *Abouts*:

The Pont du Gard (the Wells family's proprioceptive playground in Scripture 21) was completed *sometime* between 40 and 60 A.D. Rare is the precision commanded by a certain museum guide who knew that a dinosaur specimen was 75 million and 72 days old. Why? Because upon starting his job seventy-two days earlier, he'd learned that the beast was 75 million years old. (Credit a French magazine, 1989.) "The average New York City subway car travels roughly 53,000 miles per year across some of the oldest transit infrastructure in the world." ("The Subway... System." NYT, 3 March 2024, p. 32.) How many kinds of dog-food crowd the aisle of a grocery store—bags, boxes, brands, cans, and chow? How many items dangle from rear-view mirrors? How many plants are named after people, such as Paulownia, Forsythia, Fuchsia, *Buddleja daviddii* (credit Fred). How many female names after plants in English: Pansy, Petunia, Ivy, Rose, Rose of Sharon ("Rosasharn" in *The Grapes of Wrath*), Tulip, Lily, Shady Grove (her name and title of the song).... Should "Bittersweet" join the list?

As you may remember, the wheel of a train weighs *about* 400 pounds and train-rails have hundreds of variations. How many miles of abandoned railroad tracks are there in the United States? Between 150,000 and 226,000 kilometers, or 140,000 miles.

(googlemapsmania.blogspot.com/2020/01/americas-abandoned-railways.html, accessed October 2021.)



By permission Nya Goines.

How many variants are there of the train-song about George Alley, who died while pulling the brake of a heavy ten-wheeler locomotive to a halt before it slammed into a boulder? At least eighty (Lyle, *Scalded*, p. 43). There are about 170 dog species. About 7,000 extant species and 13,000 extinct of Echinoderms. (“Echinodermata.” ScienceDirect Topics.). As *Angel* has noted, billions of neurons fit into the human brain.

How many colors can humans perceive? Why not start with the 5LLC system’s 1114 “spot colors”—in printing, those generated by ink, pure or mixed. These “greens” are distinguished in *Werner’s Nomenclature of Colours*: celandine, mountain, leek, blackish, verdigris, bluish, apple, emerald, grass, duck, sap, pistachio, asparagus, olive, oil, and siskin. (2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1821.)

How many genes show signs of recent evolution? Between several hundred and a thousand. (6) Rare diseases, to the shame of plenitude, are abundant as to kind: “there may be

as many as 7,000.” (rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/pages/31/faqs-about-rare-diseases)

Although there are over 10,000 Catholic saints so far, the precise number “will always be debatable” (uscatholic.org/articles/201310/how-many-saints-are-there/, accessed March 13, 2023).

About fifty species fill the book *Cats*. “There are one thousand and one approaches to animal painting,” estimates by Rockwell Kent in *World-Famous*, Plate 72. There are about 30 varieties of the Spanish language. How many examples of Spanish slang (e.g. *estar piripi*, “to be tipsy”)? In French, examples of disparaging argot:

Boucaque and *Bougnoul* are racist slurs. They are particularly used in the South of France against people whose skin is dark. The first is a portmanteau that combines *bougnoul*—a word applied to Arabs—and *macaque*, a word applied to blacks. It emerged at the end of the 1990s. *Boucaque* is a sort of generic term, a catch-all racist slur. (Véronique Seiler.)

Nicknames for instruments of torture? Names of old-time patent medicines, (1) without alcohol or (2) with, an important distinction to many users. How many El Rancho Motels? In the United States, how many female first names share surnames such as Madison, Tiffany, Kimberly, and Reagan? How many synthetic African American first-names seem to derive from the letters in *Tae Kwon Do* plus an apostrophe? How many African American men can play the boogie-woogie? At least fifty-one, to judge from Randall’s double-CD collection. (The first is “Boogie Woogie Stomp,” with Albert Ammons—“As Good as it Gets,” 2000.)

How many ways of not dying in an obituary? One is to *sort-of* “pass.” This euphemism suggests the person has advanced to another grade, or succeeded at an exam, or transmogrified to another mode of existence. Even a certain right whale “passed away.” Another avoidance technique is

circumlocution. Heartfelt examples from the *Roanoke Times*:

“Went to be with the Lord.” “Arrived at her heavenly mansion where she was welcomed by Jesus who handed her the keys.” “Went back into [her late husband’s] arms and with our Lord.” “Answered the call from our Lord to take a rest from this life and come Live Forever with Him.” “Went to Glory.” Never invoked: “Went straight to hell at age fifty-six, fifty years too late.”



Could there be more print-patterns than these in Schoolhouse Fabrics?

How many melodies can be accommodated by one small framework? How many permutations, for example, can be accommodated by *Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol*? These can be represented by CDEFG, on the piano. How many tunes can meet the following criteria. (1) They use all five-of these notes, and only these (no sharps or flats), in no matter what order or rhythm.(2) They persist over at least two successive measures.

Examples identified by title or words:

- * “Rain,” the author’s first piano piece (in G major, composer unknown).
- * “Jingle Bells.”
- * “Hot Cross Buns.”
- * “Frère Jacques.”
- * ”Merrily we roll along.”
- * “Mary had a Little Lamb.”
- * “Oh when the Saints Go Marching In.”
- * “There’s a bright golden haze on the meadow,” Rodgers and Hammerstein.
- * “When you walk through a storm,” Rodgers and Hammerstein.
- * “With a Little Help from My Friends,” by Lennon and McCartney.
- * “Round and round...,” by Joni Mitchell, “Circle Game.”
- * “Some say love...,” by Amanda McBroom, “The Rose.”
- * Measures that include “pneumonia,” by Bacharach.
- * “Pues si Vivimos” (traditional song).
- * “Angels we have heard on high.”
- * “All Creatures of our God and King” (hymn, “Lasst Uns Erfreuen”).
- * “Wonderful Christmastime,” Paul McCartney.
- * “I Wish You Love” (English language version of French popular song).
- * “Lord Randall My Son.”

“Clang-clang’ went the trolley” rolls across only three notes in four measures.

Classical *do-re-me-fa-sol* permutations:

- * Beethoven, “Ode to Joy.”
- * Beethoven, Second Movement of *Seventh Symphony*: CDE/FGFEDEFDC.
- * Handel, “See, the Conqu’ring Hero Comes.” (*Judas Maccabeus*: G-E-FG-C-DEFGF-E-D.)
- * Brahms, *Variation on a Theme by Haydn*, Op. 56.
- * First bars of Mozart’s Piano Concerto 11. (Theme to be varied.)

Two successive stanzas of *The Blue Danube*, by Johann Strauss, II, include no *D*. Ditto *Going Home*,” in Dvorak’s *New World Symphony*, no *F*. And ditto *Finlandia Hymn*, by Sibelius, no *G*.

Can you name the hymn tune below, which was played by a church-bell near Maryville College?
****:



Musical notation courtesy of Vickie Sowers.

NOTES

* French, Haitian, and Syrian.

** *Demise of damsels*: (1) **arrow**: Polly. (2) **snake**: Mousie. (3) **chair**: Frankie. (4) **drowning**: Clementine (dreadful sorry). (5) **fever**: Molly. (6) **stabbing**: "My love" (along the Ohio River). (7) **unknown**: Corey, who probably died of Lifestyle (which included drinkin' sweet pizen likker with a lowdown sorry man).

*** Genetic quartet: (1) Colette (2) Randall (3) Marjory, (4) Mellissa. The author bought a flock of sheep before Ancestry revised "Basque" to "Scandinavian."

**** "Come Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain."

yo conocí a mi papá a los 12 años ²³²
vivi en cuba en la pobreza total a
los 19 años salí de cuba con mi hija
de 1 año y 8 meses en la travesía nos
cojieron y estubo presa 2 noches
cuando me soltarón tube q' caminar
30 millas con mi hija en brazos por
la noche con una neblina q' no podía
ni ver a los 2 días me puden
ir de Cuba uuyendo porque me
llebe a mi hija escondida de su
padre y uuyendo de el regimen de
Castro cuando me monté en el
bote venia entrando agua y mi
hija venia boitando y desidra toda
llena de grina y uias la travesía
era de 2 días mi hija chopaba solo
pecho y cuando llegamos ella estaba
enferrma cuando yo vi a mi papa
fue la experiencia muy linda
esa es una parte de mi vida
muy triste pero estoy en libertad
Gracias a los estados unidos
Gracias America
Yai Kimi Velasquez

(1) Her original account in Spanish, translated by Linda R. Henderson.

Scripture 30

Geodysey VII: "How Can This Be?!"

"You know what you're getting into."

Despite this implied warning, I sign the contract, pay \$55, and haul my gear up the ramp to the French ship *Laos*. This name is gratifying because the ferment in the terra incognita of Southeast Asia, which I read about in the dorm, has partly inspired this venture. My toes squeeze hold of sandals called "thongs," while my boots and winter coat jam a canvas-like suitcase along with souvenirs. It also holds an Asian edition of my favorite magazine, whose cover pictures another earth-circler.



Asian Edition, March 2, 1962. Author's souvenir.

At first a bunch of us young males slept in hammocks that surrounded one of the holds, but partway through the voyage we were transferred to cabins. Mine was Number 12, which I pronounced *Deuze* instead of *Douze*, so the steward had to backtrack from Cabin 2 with his grumpy key. The expected comfort turned out to be a room packed with six men and vented with the same odor that forced us to eat our meals on deck.

The dining room contained about one-hundred caged monkeys, some that had chattered their last, as well as thirty-five crates of eels, some that managed to squiggle onto the floor. In the cabin I watched for one to plummet from the vent. Missing Tom, I wondered what merriment we'd derive from the way the Chinese in business suits ate while crouching atop the picnic-table benches. Talented young people were able to complain in Hebrew, Spanish, English, German, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indonesian. Meanwhile, as I learned afterward, something in the world was touring Tom. He sweated and sweated in bed with almost nothing on, while the seventeen-year-old daughter of the family would bring him cool drinks. "I knew I was getting better when I appreciated the daughter more than the ice."



Recovered and saronged near Surabaya, Indonesia.

About our midway port of Saigon, however, most of the voyagers spoke positively. With its classical architecture, the place resembled the provincial city of Nancy, where golden wrought-iron portals had opened for a Citroën with two hitchhikers. Now from a sidewalk table I watched girls pedal by in colorful, flowing outfits, just as they do in heaven. Yet why are there a few Americans in uniform? A troubling incongruity like the bombed, burnt-out wing of the palace. Then the ship once again floated upon the Mekong River. It wound between peaceful marshes that contrasted ominously with steel-shielding on the hull and guards on the deck.



Kobe: from “Moshie-moshie” to
“Sayonara” almost two weeks later.

One night as the *Laos* plied the South China Sea toward Hong Kong, I was startled to realize that the constellations of a few nights earlier had dropped toward the stern.

The ship having docked in Hong Kong, I temporarily exchanged it for a red, uphill-and-downhill-double decker, which seemed as out of place as I was. I remembered sitting on the top level of one of these machines as Tom and I rode from London toward Dover, when an explosion shook my bones: trying to recover, I understood that the top of the bus had struck a branch.

Taking a ferry to Kowloon, I was lucky to afford a museum-quality gift for brother Cap, a mask of rosewood carved into gorgeous fury.

After another night or two, those primates who could debark did so at Kobe, Japan. A day later I was riding a train from Osaka to visit the family of a college mate.

“Strange city,” I thought, as buildings shrank and streets gave way to rice fields. Wrong train, this time not a victim of underground inebriation. The visit successful, I departed a little shakily with cushion legs and thank-you doll.

Little daunted by the earlier navigational mistake, feeling able to find my way anywhere, I eventually got off another train in Yokohama. I was delighted to chat with a pilot with JAL who’d been raised in Wheaton. Never thought I’d be happy to say “I live near the Ice House.” In a hotel I had fallen asleep in a bathtub when a friendly young woman appeared and took a gentle cloth to my back. No dream. She rubbed off the scent of monkeys, the cold and gray of returned clouds, the slight ache of homesickness, the challenge of solitude, and the press of masked Oriental crowds.

I made my way to Nagoya, home of a high school exchange student who was attending college in Tokyo: Tsutomu (“Licky”) Hirayama. His sister wrote a house-address on a scrap of paper, in Japanese, and offered a skeptical supplement: “Tokyo a big place.” Taking a half-dozen trains, above and below ground, presenting my chit to strangers, and accepting the offer of a ride on a tipsy motorcycle. We bumped through a neighborhood that numbered houses by seniority and reached Licky’s place. After a reunion across time and space, we departed for Nagoya in a day or two, I wearing a monk-like thick-plastic raincoat, my knapsack sprouting a camellia given to me by my host’s aunt.

In Nagoya, we went boating in a park—the strange luxury of transportation to no destination. With his father we played a card game: because it required us to name the pictured animals in Japanese, we imitated sounds instead—i.e., “MO.” And we shared a language common to all people, laughter. Then came a railroad expedition to the southern tip of Hokkaido. Licky and I spent some hours standing amid the racket between crowded cars, joking & smoking (his pack). We made a pilgrimage to Hiroshima, a city that looked as if constructed all at once, and not long before. There we stood near the ruins of the Industrial Promotion Center under sullen clouds

where, to quote one victim of the bomb, “The sun touched the earth.”

Eventually we almost ran out of kinfolk with their floors, mats, and quiet voices. We even ran out of land, so we took a ferry to Beppu, the country’s southernmost island, home of Licky’s cousin. On our return, the ferry’s second-class accommodation (across who-knew-what-body of water) consisted of a raised floor on which to sleep if you could find a place.

My pal took a head-cold toward Nagoya and I sought the YMCA in Kobe, bedraggled from our night on the carpet, and at once fell asleep to the remembered muffled groan of tram-wheels.

Next day I hauled my gear to the *Argentina Maru* along with a ticket worth \$266, about a hundred dollars more than the transatlantic price. It had been bought in Singapore with a loan from my mother’s supervisor at the Glen Ellyn Public Library. I retreated far below and climbed to my berth, the top one of three, then made a couple of trips down and up to carry my stuff. Drawing the curtains, I assumed the fetal position. After four hours I felt safe enough to climb back down and venture to the deck, expecting to behold the limitless liquid that was the means of overcoming itself.

“Damn!” From out of the Pacific Ocean jutted a boulder! “*How can this be?*” My escape had come to naught, and worse, more of these wave-slapped erratics that stuck out above the rolling surface. I set my jaw and padded around and around in my thongs, between stern and bow, motion upon locomotion. A moment of happiness did come when my pal Mr. Kawasaki brought a telegram: “Bon Voyage from the Hirayamas.”



It’s not bumming if you’re left-handed.



Argentina Maru docked: No round trips.



The first week at sea I met only a few of my shipmates, for the vessel was hit by the edge of a typhoon that damaged Japan. Thirteen vignettes now record as many days sailing as the only Caucasian among 700 Japanese emigrating to South America:

- * As the weather becomes rough, I return to our cavernous bay, its walls jammed with berth-towers separated by curtains on the front and sides. Infants wail as adults retch and moan. Little affected by the rough sea, I fashion a nest partially with my faded green coat, the armpit sewn up this time by Licky's mother. For my personal repair, time is the thread, distance the needle.
- * I hand down an unopened bottle of Dramamine carried from Illinois. The groom, his bride lying beside him, clasps it gratefully and averts his eyes from a box of wedding chocolates he hands up in exchange.
- * The benches and tables of our dining area careen from wall to wall, smashing dishes and nerves. Twice more they are flung around as heavy steel doors break free to slam back and forth. For the next few days, those of us who can swallow are served one dish at a time in our dormitory. All too alarming to be exciting.
- * The ship now pitches forward and back. Again I chat with the man in the top bunk next door, a genial florist from California. Again I draw the curtain and begin another escaperback.
- * As the *Argentina* pulls farther from the typhoon, its thrashing decreases. The deck is still off-limits, but I climb the last set of stairs and peer around—just as a wave explodes through round holes in the superstructure.
- * A few of us venture to the dining hall. I have saved \$15 by eating native fare: lacquered bowls of sticky, tasteless rice, a shred of fish, various little things that seem half animal, half vegetable, noodle-dealies, and egg-chemical soup with balls of dubious provenience. Yet I enjoy the unusual dishes, the company, and even the wooden, sliding-top box that holds my chopsticks, courtesy of the ONK Line:



- * I hang around the canteen, pretzels and beer in hand, maybe a cup of “cohee.” No Burmese French toast, but cookies provide much of my diet. I inspect the wall-map that plots our overnight distance and records our new time. No jet-lag, in fact none on the trip.
- * The slow days tax and strengthen my patience. No stops at a dock or station, no *Cha-aie* with the weight of a clay cup transferred through a raised window. I whistle Handel to sandal as each flip-flop slaps around and around the deck, automatically compensating for its rise and fall.
- * Although all clouds have vanished. Yet the blueness of the now-far-spaced waves seems deceptive, even sinister compared to their height. Rolling hills indeed. I watch near a bunch of kids as the stern— which towered above the pier in Kobe—dips so far into the trough that the crests of the opposite swells almost reach the level of the deck. Now *up, up, up* breaches the stern as the sky alone is visible and the ship tiny and helpless. Down it plummets as I hold both rail and breath. We all stare wide-eyed into the blue mass as it breaks through the nautical banister, slams down a child, and leaves a swirl of seawater mixed with a little blood.
- * In the captain’s office, perhaps, I give another English lesson for the handful of immigrants to the United States. A hundred of us watch some kind of movie whose reels stretch across a few more knots.
- * Kawasaki-san (my neighbor) carries his accordion onto the deck, and at my direction sixty-five junior-high-schoolers sing “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean.”
- * After almost two weeks aboard ship—up to the left, on the horizon—I am nonplussed to behold a floating object. Low, brown, and horizontal, a broken-off mass of logs and turf? But doesn’t it form a right angle? Isn’t it resolving into the familiar shape of—*land!* Long Beach, California! How different is this vision from one in early October—when a bunch of us young adventurers, excited and apprehensive, watched from the deck as the pier and Boston itself slowly diminished and then sank under the horizon.

As Kawasaki-san and I make our way down the gangplank, a chorus of children manages “Auld Lang Syne” in Japanese and “My Bonnie” in English. The whole deck resounds with “Goodbye!” The two of us wave and wave, yelling “Sayonara.” Scores of arms wave back. “Good-bye, Randy-san!” Out of excitement I have forgotten my bedroll with its microscopic travel-decals, but I still shoulder my backpack and carry a suitcase. After up-and-downing over a vast bulge of the globe, I now hear my right boot clomp as it senses flat and unyielding wood. *Safe!*

Scripture 31

Revelation: "Nothing is Holy, Much is Precious"



Whump-a-boom! Flap-flap-a-thud!

The surface of Trex darkens with a bulky rolling. Has a hang glider fallen off the roof, as if from the café-top on the Chartreuse Range? I have been looking across the valley at two Bradford Pears in egg-shaped blossom. They glow around the edges, then turn dull every time a Sunday morning shadow races across them and up the hill and peels the grass to bright green. Now I shoot up from the chair and discern—what? A pair of outsized wings?! Are they not attached to a human shape? As it labors to stand, I slide open the windowed door, then the screen, and rush out. The figure lifts its head to reveal the dazed face of a woman. “Thanks,” she says weakly. “Guess I misjudged.”

Reaching under her arms, which extended beneath feathers, I found her not weightless and in fact strained to help her rise. Her legs were covered with insulated pants that extended to boots under a white robe. The wings, unlike those of the cement statuette my grandson had admired in K-Mart, bore no filigree of holes (aerodynamically dubious like those of stone). Squeezing through the doorway, they sprang open a bit and one of them fanned an orchid on the table.

“Careful, my wife counts the petals.” I helped this apparition settle in a dining room chair and brought her a glass of water. After a few moments I asked if she could tell me who she was.

“I am Unfaith.”

After a long moment: “Un—”

“Yes, Unfaith, the Angel of Unbelief.”

No wink, straight gaze, silence. “Angel,” I thought, “Unbelief.” Not only dumbfounded, I was embarrassed to recall a sign in the window of Victoria’s Secret: “Even angels need a little lift.” And why was she so unlike the figurines at the Trading Post? Her face and arms were a mixture of tints—light brown and daffodil among them. And instead of long, curly locks she had a spiky do, and her arms seemed more muscle than willow. I stole a glance through the downhill window, but my potential witness had only begun her church service. Well, what else but to go along with it: “I’m Randall.”

“Yes.”

What now? Did she know me? “Yes?” I repeated.

“I heard your prayer.”

“My—?”

”For encouragement.“

My memory rewound to the new president’s words: “And people of no faith.” They were dramatically inclusive. Yet the old uneasiness returned. I could deal with the lack of assurance about meaning or purpose, no sense of otherworldly control or comfort, no hope of a better life beyond this one, no benefit of shared belief in the divine. But to be an oddball in a world of devotees.... I now remembered wishing fervently for a lift of my own. “Oh,” I mumbled, “thanks.”

“You have a nice place. With thick logs.” To my relief she sounded less shaken as she inspected the vaulted pine-ceiling. “Knotty constellations.”

“Uh-huh,” I replied, wishing I had said that. Around her eyes the impressions left by the goggles had filled in. I remembered how Sidney, as a two-year-old, had discovered a pair at the swimming pool, wrestled them on with my help, and peered out tentatively from their pink grip. When her glance fell upon a bottle of wine I asked if she would like something other than water, and in a minute the corkscrew had done its work.

I cast about for a topic. “Unfaith, my friend Richard said that we agnostics and atheists are the last ones in the closet.”

“Indeed. We’re not only *not* out, we’re *without*. We’re *a*-theists, without God. We’re even *ag-nostics*—sorry, bad Greek, *a-gnostics*—without knowing.” She gave her glass a swirl. “We’re faithless, godless, even infidels. Kafirs. We’re not ‘spiritual,’ so I guess we’re soul-less, just materialistic. A collection of atoms.”

“A combination,” I granted, “but not *just*.”

“In fact, Randall, don’t you think humans make the miraculous superfluous? To conceive of symbols! To speak, listen, write, read, paint, compose, dance, think—to love—more wondrous than a holy stroll on a lake. Even to imagine the supernatural itself! Yet unless we regard ourselves as divinely-sparked, we’re accused of being—mechanical. ”

“Wind me up, Scotty!” I watched in vain for a smile. She took another sip and folded her arms, unlike angels in the Trading Post who clasped their hands in prayer or bent their knees demurely. To keep things going, I asked what she liked to be called.

“‘Unfaith.’ Like Jophiel, the female angel.”

“I mean, for example, ‘secular humanist,’ or ‘freethinker.’”

“Hmmm.... Isn’t that last one impossible?” My puzzled look brought an explanation. “Well, in order to think, one has to manipulate concepts, which depend on language and culture, which already organize life in an arbitrary way.”

“A feathered professor,” I thought, but replied “So true.” After a moment: “Here’s an example of one of those cultural words—it’s ‘spiritual.’”

“Oh, what is it?”

“No, I mean that’s the word, ‘spiritual.’”

“Oh. Why does it bother you, Randall?”

“Well, it has to be holy. There’s no equivalent that’s free of otherworld-gluten. May I you a story?”

“To be sure. I welcome a rest is welcome after my—my miscalculation.” She rubbed a leg.

“Marjory and I, along with our friends Richard and Thea, met Jim and Linda at their boat dock in South Carolina. We didn’t go anywhere, upstream or down, just tied up, bundled up, sipped expensive champagne, and watched ice-stars sparkle and gently roll atop the Waccamaw River. (The water is already dark with swamp-loads of tannin.) At midnight, our hosts lit up the steep bank with fireworks, for what had arrived but the Year 2000! On the way home, the car radio blared out *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*—the version orchestrated by Leopold Stokowski—called ‘Big Bach’ by the announcer. Awesome this side of fearsome. I steered our chunky Astro Van down the black highway as if powered by—well, polyphony. Unfaith, was this experience spiritual?”

“First, Randall—her fingers grasped my wrist—“I must warn you about music!” With brow furrowed. “Ave Maria,” by Schubert, for instance—it can have you fingering a rosary! Even

secular music can touch you with a divine-like something. Remember, even The Devil plays the didgeridoo!” Unable to recall this fact, and startled by her admonition, I almost forgot “spiritual.”

“Randall, may I tell *you* a story?”

“Sure.”

“One of our number was listening to contraband headphones—“

“Flying?”

“Yes. And into a steeple.” I turned my head as if from the scene. “The tape was still unwinding—to *Holberg Suite*, by Grieg.”

Numbly: “Steeple.”

“There’s an aria in *Samson and Delilah*—I don’t trust my Italian for the name, especially after a glass of wine.”

Desperate for a tangent: “Um, Unfaith—about flying. This guy on TV said a bird in Indonesia must be a pterodactyl. He spoke with such conviction, so bland—I had to wonder if it was Jonathan Winters puttin’ me on.” This reference to the comedian drew nary a grin.

“Randall, some believers fear a continuum. You know, from present-day animals back to earlier versions because humans themselves—”

“Adam the African!”

This time smiling, she continued. “Evolution—the theory—tosses a fossil through the stained glass.” With a touch of ceremony I poured us a refill. She thought for a while and then picked up an earlier thread. “Randall, why do you think some people resist believing—“

I jumped in. “For one thing, experiences. My classmate used to honk every time he drove past a school where nuns packed rulers.”

“So...a foot slapped a hand.” Wondering how she had misunderstood, I continued:

“Our friend, an Episcopal priest, deserted Catholegalism. When another friend was divorced after two children and almost two decades, she received a notice of annulment—addressed to her maiden name. My pal Tom tells about his grandparents, who attended the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. They were criticized for being too worldly, for Little Egypt danced on the Midway and the church did not regard the fair as educational for teachers. So they were shunned and lost their jobs. His father always suspected another cause: ‘Grandpa had ordered building supplies from Sears and the local hardware store owner wanted to punish him.’”

“The way of the world for sure.”

“As for other people who doubt, Unfaith—you know the old saying, ‘God never gives us too heavy a load’—well maybe he does.”

“The Divine Divvier.”

I continued. “Some are just skeptical. My friend Dennis slipped out the back door of Hebrew school. But our daughter returned from Baptist daycare to ask ‘Why does Jesus make the sun come out and sweat us?’ Years later her own four-year-old, Sid, shared his understanding of theology: ‘Hi Grandpa, my elephant died to heaven last night but came back because he didn’t like God.’ The child did become more orthodox: ‘You go to heaven—*Hey, God!*—and you start living again!’ The way children are molded! Like the boys sewn into long underwear for the winter— in old-time South Carolina, out in the country.”

She perused the knotholes. “Ironically, Randall, in religion, *where* you are is *what* you are. In some Moslem lands, it’s best to keep on the Sunni side.”

It took me a moment to get her pun. Fishing for respect: “It’s all so deterministic.”

“Yes, accidentals become essentials.” One-upped again. “By the way, many freethinkers are interested in theology.”

“Oh, I’ve read *Angels & Demons*.”

“Kitsch.”

“No, Brown—Dan Brown.”

Her glass levitated redly. She took a final swallow and mused. “Non-believers can thank God, so to speak, if they live where they don’t risk their lives.” More thought. “But at the same time we freethinkers object when the devout tender holy scrip instead of secular cash. Randall, this whole impulse toward civic religiosity—”

“Hmm. Not quite understanding the scrip reference,” I tried to keep up. “In the Pledge of Allegiance, I just cough at ‘under God.’ This phrase was stuck in when I was a boy, I guess to distinguish us from Communists. Seemed natural to a Boy Scout—*you* know, ‘reverence’ in the Boy Scout pledge.” Sure, Rand, she knows about Troop 44.

“My host, don’t you think that ‘under God’ itself contradicts ‘with liberty’? That the Pledge forces ‘Nons’ to be devout in order to be loyal?”

“Now that I think of it, those two phrases compete like fatsos in a Figaro.”

She cocked her head. Then after another sip or two: “Randall, could there be more disparity among believers than between believers and ‘Uns’?”

I rattled the idea around in my baldness. “Good question to enjoy never being able to answer.”

“There are rifts among us, too. As for the Right-Wingers....” (Let it go, Rand.) “They favor confrontation, but we urge humility, goodwill, even respect. Some of us feel sympathy and even affection toward religion, although some despise it. Besides, don’t you suspect that many of the faithful are faders?” She made air-quotes with her fingers: “‘*What is doubt? Doubt is the stalk of the sunflower of faith.*’”

My attempt to interpret this metaphor was superseded (and perhaps excused) by the memory of a patch of tree-like sunflowers on a paper route.

“Randall, I notice the collection on your walls.” Would she ask who had photographed those rural people of Haute-Loire? “So much visual art honors religion.” She threw out an unfamiliar name.

“Who is Andy Freud?”

“*An... die... Freude*,” as if helping me read her lips. “Schiller’s poem, Beethoven’s song. Joy springs ultimately from God, but—”

“I’m sure you’re right.” I refrained from checking the clock.

“Also, Randall, we honor the word ‘joy’ but distrust ‘free.’” My glass stopped in midair. “Because everybody thinks it’s a desideratum, so they harmonize their beliefs with it. Every dogma liberates the tangled neurons—if only from other creeds, fear or aimlessness, or even freedom itself.”

I was treading water. “Somebody said ‘Freedom is perfect control.’” What should she do but burst into song!

“*Perfect submission, all is at re-est.*”

After the cabin’s logs stopped echoing I ventured a question: “Unfaith, what belief do you submit to, so to speak?”

“*Nothing is holy, much is precious.*”



Orion’s belt missed a knothole-loop, while from others sprouted needles, woody bracted cones, even a spray of pollen. After a sneeze and a few long moments, I poured myself a refill and, when she regarded her empty glass, did the same for her. “Unfaith—the label of the wine bottle—‘St. Francis.’ Are you familiar with St. Thomas Aquinas?”

“He made an inventory of all the angels except real ones.”

I managed an “Uh-huh.”

“But his mind should be venerated. For its breadth and depth.” Her own mind paused for a moment. “Yet the basis of religion is never logic—even in Latin, a language with seven cases.” (Leans forward, she pressed finger to forehead.) “Let’s see—nominative, genitive, dative, accusative and ablative. The other two are rarely used. Ummm...locative and vocative!” The hint of a smile.

“And about logic....”

“Oh, sorry: ‘*Faith rushes in where reason fears to tread.*’ Take the idea of ‘God’—if somebody came to this troubled earth from outer space, would they imagine a benevolent power-in-charge? Oh, look at those goldfinches!” A pair on the deck-rail seemed entrusted with the Yellow Standard.

“They’re like a gift from on high—if there were such a thing.”

“Add them to the holy bestiary. A tortoise that carries the backpack-world, jaguars, lynxes, sphinxes... Grandfather Eagle... Noah’s cubits even rescued a talking serpent, the Lion of Judah, an entire deck of sheep, a red-headed cow, the Beast by Land and Sea—”

“Dominick the Donkey.” My wisecrack drew that nobody-home look, so I tried again. “And the Dalai Llama.”

Apparently in thought, she went on. “Birds, of course, sacrificed to Jehovah for various infractions— tardiness, dropping dove-doo on a synagogue.... A pigeon for extra credit.”

Why couldn’t I get a nice angel like the one on the shelf next to Death Riding a Motorcycle? I remembered her delicate lips and décolleté prom dress. Why did I have to get a visitor who wore practical eyegear? Instead of a star in her hair, like the emblem of Arbuckle’s Coffee?

“—that word ‘faith.’”—she had been expounding.
“We try to avoid it.”

“Because—?”

“If I might refer to our catechism: *What is faith?* (poking the air). *Faith is a maidservant who lieth down on the job.* You see, this impulse services anyone, indiscriminately. To our ruder comrades—please excuse me—*‘Faith is a whore with a halo.’*” I studied the wine-label as she continued:



“Maybe I can appease the gods by dribbling some of this onto the ground”—she angled the bottle over the floorboards—“a hint of oak.”

Time to switch topics. “Unfaith, why don’t you run across Superman on your flights?” When she shook her head, I answered: “Because phone booths are obsolete.”

She stared before resuming in earnest. “We’re skeptical of heroes in capes. In fact of any messiah.”

“Well, do you credit any scriptures—you know, of various religions?”

“According to our Right Wing”—I blinked—“they are haphazard scrapbooks bound by ethnicity and era. But my own group—the world has endless variety, Randall—is more latitudinarian. We imagine such collections as an attic, one that’s voluminous, dim, jumbled in an inviting way.”

“*Attic! Attic!*” She ignored my outburst and continued a picture of a thousand words. To myself, “That’s where I stowed those fragments! On how to make glass—and what was the other?”

“Under a bare light bulb.” She was elaborating. “See how the obsolete leans against the seasonal, how the useless and workaday jam a trunk along with the heirloom....”

“*Stmt oea!*”

“Beg pardon?”

“The pebble ceremony—Akkadian.”

“Certainly, Randall, cuneiform records are valuable. Yet in this attic, under an ice skate or a tilted birdcage, behold a golden gleam—“

“But not from clay tablets.”

“No, I’m talking about intangible treasures. Some of them are parables of Jesus —Hope Diamonds of Humanism. But of course all sacred writ—including *Summa Theologica*—was compiled before the insights of geology, genetics, astronomy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, paleo-archeology, astrobiology—“

“Orthodonture.”

She betrayed a smile. “We’re even skeptical about the word ‘know,’ which usually means ‘believe.’ As you may recall from Philosophy 101: to *know* anything it must be *true*. Yet by definition theology cannot be established as fact.”

“Unfaith, I used to tell my students, ‘Don’t be afraid to say ‘Beats me.’”

“Babashanda!” She held out her glass for a toast. “Many of us skeptics try not to be like fundamentalists of any stripe—we tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity, and some of us even enjoy them. I guess you could say that we like to reflect *upon*, instead of just reflect like a mirror.” I started to warm toward this character even though she had violated Ann Landers’ injunction *Never Drop In*. “Randall, do you know what Jean de la Fontaine wrote?”

“M-mmm.”

“‘*Everyone believes very easily whatever he fears or desires.*’ Look at bearded theology.”

“Bearded...?”

“Yes, patriarchal. The Men Upstairs.”

The phrase “Old and New Testicles” came to mind and stayed there. “Unfaith, how can people be so hard-boiled about practical matters ‘n’ stuff, and then—”

“Not notice the bar-code on Santa’s gift? Why would they want to?” Silence. In a kindly tone: “Would you want all people to be like you? To disown a cosmology that secures them to life, like gravity?”

“I guess not.” After musing: “And to a life after this one.” Her boots scuffed. “Unfaith, what about heaven? Can you tell me what your freethinkers, well, think?”

“Whoever expects an afterlife will not be disappointed.” Silence. I was struggling to decipher this conundrum when she changed the subject.

“Do you think that some people are born to believe?” I imagined these last three words as a tattoo. Then I remembered how Ernie Lion once held open his screen door and exposed the tattooed numbers engraved on his forearm arm, the 9s plumply European. After his experience in three concentration camps he had lost his faith, but in his final days converted to Roman Catholicism: “A person has to believe in something.”

“Randall?”

“Sorry, just thinking about a late friend. Anyway, Unfaith, belief doesn’t make you a robot. One of my colleagues, Don Millus, was a devout Catholic, but he was also a scholar of an eminent Protestant—one he admired enough to give their child the middle name ‘Tyndale.’”

Again that rich alto voice: “*By the light of bur-ning mar-tyrs.*” These stray and enigmatic lyrics accompanied another appreciation of the orchid. Her eyes began with the leaves, which rippled horizontally away from the pot, glossy and turgid, then followed the stem upward to where it became a T, then traced one group of petals with their fine, light-purple veins.

“Unfaith, doesn’t each bunch of sepals—one-two-three-four-five—look like a pinwheel?”

“Yes. Or like a prayer-wheel!” After a moment she lifted her gaze to the chain-suspended lamp. “Oh, they’re convex, the glass pieces! And leaded. A merry-go-round of fruit! Randall, which is your favorite?”

“Ummm.... The grape!” She beamed and again held out a glass, and two crystal glasses rang out like—

“God’s doorbell!” she exclaimed merrily. She began singing to back-and-forth dips: “*Amaa-zing grapes, how sweet the sound / Of corks being pulled out fre-ee, / I once was dry, but then I downed / Your white and bur-gundy.*” She stopped abruptly: “I think it’s an instinct.”

“What?”

“Randall, don’t you agree that belief in the supernatural isn’t so much a matter of temperament? But of survival, and over millennia. Prevenient wiring.” She studied the table. “So, ironically, that would make faith a necessity for your skepticism.”

“Beg pardon”

“Well, your devout forebears.” I thought of Sophia. “They survived disease, famine, war, heartbreak, and whatever, thanks to confidence in ultimate meaning and to the—the stick-together.” t

“So my religious ancestors—“

“Created a *Nonster*.” A chuckle for her, a blush for me.

How easy to change the subject. “Unfaith, in a store there’s this miniature statue of an angel, sort of a teenager, who’s riding on a horse.”

“Oh, yes, multicolored. We call her Polly Pastel.”

“How come she has to ride a horse if she has wings?”

“Let’s see.... Gender-construction. Whoever buys it wants her to be spiritual but not asexual. There’s the makeup, the impractical costume, the sidesaddle.” She pondered. “Maybe they want beauty without power—useless wings, just pretty, all the work done by the animal, no doubt a male.” After a moment: “The psalm says that God shall cover thee with his pinions, and his angels used to be males, but they seem to have become feminized. Ancillary in the Latin *sense*, *you* know.”

I *did* know that I had little desire to correct any imbalance. What if she intended to *draft* me! I vowed that nobody would jingle up a pair of Randall-flappers. Could I at least get a postponement?



After a while the cabernet eased my tension. “Unfaith, why are some women *unfeminized*? By religion? Why are they weighed down by a black costume that hides their entire body? People can’t see, and they can only peep.”

“Sartorial slavery.” These words hung in the air. “It’s a uniform that warns “No Trespassing.”

“No—“

“Property of other males.”

After a while, I responded with tangent. “Unfaith, you could see through those pine needles and leaves to the other side of Dodd Creek, you would spot this white block—a carving, or a mold, of a young woman about this high. With wings that point upward and an outsize Bible in her hands. Somehow the artist has made long, curved folds in her gown, and at the hem, one bare foot is sticking out.”

“Probably what I’ll call ‘alaplaster.’ As white as she can get.” I newly appreciated my visitor’s tint, and as she went on, remembered traveling where skin was light or dark brown, or yellowish.

“Still, I always want to invite this effigy to come with us on our hikes, let her offer an apple to the donkey, maybe surprise it with a carrot from a pocket. But just mum marble. Does she hear me? Do you know of Rapunzel? Both of them are—what’s the word, ‘immured.’ Except the outside girl is trapped in a tower of herself.”

“Yes! That young woman with a goldenrod waterfall! I used to circle the windowless opening to hear her sing. It was a folk-ditty about a little wild bird—ah, ‘*Es flog ein*’ something. “The last time I passed, an older woman was sitting there alone with a dour expression. It made a strange contrast to her rich green costume.”

“Terre verte.”

A quizzical look, then more schooling. “Miss Yard-Angel shows how easy it is to envision the ineffable however way you want.”

“I guess so. But how can people can be so certain about Father God?”—remembering to punctuate the name with fingers.

“Randall, let me share a bit more of our catechism.” She assumed a formal tone: “*Is there a god?*” I waited. “*It matters not.*”

“*Not?! We* talked over each other for a few moments, but she prevailed:

“This personage seems to have little interest in its creation. ‘*No deity on duty,*’ we say. The world can be harsh and precarious. One way to deal with it is to imagine a divine realm that promises security, comfort, meaning, and even goodness.”

“Another way?”

“To conclude that a supposedly omnipotent and benevolent deity is mocked by this rolling palimpsest of misery.”

Silence. I caught her idea, give or take a few syllables, then forged on. “Unfaith, as for the eternal—there’s a big rock on our property that’s older than God!” At her quizzical look: “It preceded the human race, so it existed before their conceptions.” She nodded. “But I wonder—don’t you agree that believers could be right, theoretically?”

“We acknowledge, respect, and even venerate the unknowable.” Air quotes: “*Mystery lives at the pleasure of humility.*” And Randall, the day you can prove a negative, you can square a circle or make a note on a piano grow louder. Holy communion, for example.” She held something invisible aloft between thumb and finger: “Wafer Miraculous or Wonder Bread?”

“Well,” I declared ruefully, “more Americans probably believe in angels than in evolution.” Uh-oh. Feathers rippled as my guest stared out at the deck, where birds pecked at the knocked-over feeder. “Sorry, Unfaith, I mean they can’t even adapt theology to—you know, to axioms of science.”

“Please go on,” without warmth.

“Once I saw this documentary on giant paleo—well, prehistoric birds. These two humans tried to run away from a beak that swooped down behind them—then you heard a thump and only one escaped.”

Taking a deep sniff from the wine glass: “*Lapsèd here below,/E’en wings waft woe.*”

“The poet,” I offered.

“Yes, Ras el Hanout.”

“Algerian?”

“Moroccan, my translation. Randall, just like my confreres (and *consoeurs*), believers are not monolithic.”

“Like herding Catholics! And I knew a Methodist—he declared that Jesus was a space traveler that zoomed from world to world. My colleague, Paul Rice, a very bright fellow, partly Native

American, followed the *Book of Common Prayer* but seemed to feel anything divine most keenly in nature.”

“An Episco-pantheist!”

“Prayer is indeed common, Unfaith, but I would never plead with some benevolent authority—to sort of clock in.”

“Prayer of petition? We call it ‘Please-on-the-knees.’ A suppliant who might shoulder a burden, or lighten it, can stay passive. You know the proverb: ‘*Dona dona nobis, makes a person o-bese.*’ (I gave a prevaricating nod.) She pondered for a moment: “But on the other hand, ‘*When sorrows like sea-billows roll....*’”

Not wishing to follow this thread, and grape-garrulous, I spoke. “Once I almost prayed to a tree.” She choked briefly. “There’s this one surviving hemlock—you can see it down the slope below, dark green needles. I was making my way down the old logging road, scouting the wilderness below, searching for a tire.”

“Tire.”

“Yes, I wanted to take a photo for this book I was writing. To illustrate incongruity—you know, the world’s anomalies—as signs of endless plenty. A phantasmagoria—which the chapters hold as the essence of life.”

“Phantasmagoria.” Silence. “And the tire?”

“Anyway, I started down toward the hemlock, planning to hold onto it as I climbed down the ravine. It had doubled in size over the years while my balance had kind of withered. I stumbled!



Plummeted down! Slammed into the trunk, ricocheted against the other side—and instead of falling flat, stuck to the tree! The left sleeve of my poncho had Velcro’ed to its rough bark—to its plates and ridges! I tugged and tugged but it was plastered on!”

“Randall!” Her eyes widened.

“I yanked the sleeve hard—all the while imagining a scream squished by girth. I wrestled to unhook the sleeve but couldn’t get a purchase from below, hanging there, to shove the plastic backward and off the bark. I had to ask: ‘Should I entreat what I am hugging?’ Well, why not. ‘Oh dear Tsuga, please remember the times I saved you from the wooly adelgid! With that tire iron to poke holes, and the watered-down poison to fill them? Remember how I scrambled around on my knees to pound in fertilizer stakes—each year the drip line had become farther out.

Trying not to fall backward on the slope or slip on dead oak leaves. Ducking under low branches, trying to avoid prickly bushes and negotiate rock-slabs? Daring to half-stand only if I was within the reach of a sapling or a small trunk—a controlled fall.”

“This is a long prayer.”

““And the time I was shocked to see white, wool-like flecks on a batch of fine needles when I turned them over. But gratefully recognized only the dappled noon-spots of May.””

Silence. “Amen?”

““And a couple of times before the first freeze, Oh Hemlock, I even emptied the cistern by threading a hose down the precipice to you.’ Unfaith, this last favor now brought a vision— of waterlogged roots, a mud-toppling trunk! So I gave the sleeve a mighty *yank*! It turned my poncho to a cape—so I whirled sideways, then tumbled to my hands & knees and rolled to the side.”

Unfaith pondered. “Many would say that your prayer was answered.” As she gently lay a hand on mine, I recalled its arboreal abrasions yet decided not to fetch the poncho with its red-ripped holes—no Show & Tell. “Randall,” she continued, “I’ve been thinking. Would you be happier in a country like England. Or France—‘post-Christian,’ although the mosques are paved with shoes.”

“Well, I did enjoy living there without seeing a fish on a car.”

“Why would anybody—” After a few moments I offered to refill her glass, which she covered with a palm: “Flying.” Now a look of concern: “Dear host, other parts of the United States owe less fealty to The Lord.”



Photo by author.

Chirp-chirp, maybe a *flog*. Receiving no answer, my guest struggled to her feet, leaned on the back of a chair, and tried to manage a sideways train of feathers. Tilting her head, she watched a cloud float safely across the Bermuda Triangle of glass. Then she turned back to the orchid, pursed her lips, and blew gently as if to make it twirl. Then she turned again: “Randall, who is the man in the photograph, looking out a window?”

“My late brother. And that’s actually a hole cut in the wall of logs. He died soon afterward.”

Her gaze turned quickly to me: “You have my sympathy. Were you close?”

I didn’t try to speak but pointed across the treetops: “Do you see that little shack in the middle of the field?”

She studied the valley. “A bit out of plumb, with a rusty roof.”

“One day Greg handed me a pair of binoculars and urged me to take a look at the pile of scrap next to it. What should I make out but a sedan.” The memory must have affected me, for she reached over and laid her warm hand on my arm for a moment. “The faithful,’ I burst out, “view God as Mapquest.” Pointing to a newspaper that lay open next to the empty bottle: “In fact here’s the Reverend Billy Graham, who answers a letter from somebody who’s drifting. ‘God has a plan for your life—so why not seek it?’ Unfaith, *I myself* could have planned better than God!”

She turned toward me. “Please don’t get wrought up.”

“When our first grandchild was a couple of years old, he got sick on a visit. We comforted him right there on the couch where I’d once had shed tears for my brother. To encourage the child to take his medicine, I swallowed a pretend-dose, yum yum! Forward thinking could have postponed that illness and swapped it into Greg—so he couldn’t take that steep bike-ride. So when the Great-Uncle recovered, he could have met Sidney, his benefactor.” Feeling the need to rub my eyes, I was dangling my glasses when she gently plucked them.

“Randall, are you with me? You seem distraught.”

After a few moments: “Sometimes a rusty-chrome bumper gleams down there, and I imagine that Greg is signaling. Or that we’re inside the car itself and when nobody comes to the drive-in window of the shed, we lay on the horn. Or that we just bounce around the field at night, shift gears, laugh. Tom and I actually did that once in his ’49 Ford coupe—through rows of dried cornstalks.” I dared to reach over and touch her wrist as I slowly retrieved the glasses. She and I must have made a strange composition while sharing the balm of quiet.

“Randall,” she said gently, “I see that your laptop computer is open. May I ask what you are working on?”

“It’s a journal. I started it my senior year of high school, back in 1960. An assignment by an English teacher. After finishing quite a few handwritten volumes I switched to the computer. Then it also became a photograph album. The Journal is not a diary—a record of the day’s activities—more like a bank vault of what I can’t stand not to salvage.”

“So you been laying up treasures on earth.”

“And *of* earth.”

“Randall, you are a genuine Secular Humanist.”

“Thank you. My entries also save what I call ‘Oral History’—scraps of email or speech that—”

“For example?”

“Yesterday our yard-guy said: ‘I’ve been workin’ on the eyeballs—making them open & close.’ Right into the journal went this report! Turns out he creates elaborate costumes, one of them supplied with a battle-axe.”

“An ensemble to open one’s eyes.”

“The Journal also records—no, more like ‘interprets’ or ‘meditates on’—whatever says *Life!* Black coffee sparks my art, so I often record the morning’s grind—Finca this, Finca that—”

“The Journal itself is probably fresh-ground from high-quality beans. Randall, I appreciate our revival.” She slid open the transparent door. As she made her way onto the deck, I shuffled and bent to press back her wings. I faintly remembered something from the book by—Carlyle Gibran? The children of Ortholon or whatever wouldn’t have to fold their wings to pass through doors. No doubt a spiritual house, not this one.

We now leaned a bit against the railing. “Unfaith, right here, on this green tube of this section, is where I once hung out all my ties.”

Her look was a question mark: “Neckties?”

I nodded. “About sixty.”

“As prayer flags? Randall, you’re a Buddhist mahnk.”

“You mean *monk*?”

“No, *manque*, m-a-n-q-u-e. You missed being a Buddhist.”

“Oh. Well, I do hope to miss out on being an angel.” There, I said it. “I trust that you paid a visit to encourage me, not to—I mean, recruit me.”

She chuckled. “Oh, no! We don’t proselytize. But we do offer a sympathetic ear to *Uns*. Are you familiar with the Baha’i movement?”

“Actually I was fond of one of their ‘Travelers.’ She rode the highways in Wyoming, by bus, to encourage adherents who might feel isolated.”

“Well, I’m what we call a ‘Visitor.’ I also encourage Nons who find themselves in the sticks of one type or another.”

“Thank you.”

With both hands she reached to her forehead, pinched the frames around the lenses, pulled them down, wriggled them into place, and surveyed the horizon. “You’re welcome again. Good clouds for flying—cumulus humilis. A downdraft you don’t want.” I filed this advice. Asking her to wait a second, I hustled back with a folding stool. “To be frank,” she said, “I’m better at takeoffs than landings.” As she climbed aboard, I steadied her hand as a wing pushed against my upper arm

with more than a little force. She peered earthward, then back at me. “Before I forget, dear host, is there anything you want to ask me—or ask *of* me?”

Was that a “piercing glance?” I labored to repress the memory of a young girl’s face—strangely enough, reflected in a rear-view mirror. Then it yielded to a vision—a hallucination?—of the earthbound angel! Ever planted beside the road as if trying to hitchhike toward life. Was I having a bad drug trip?

“Randall?”

I could barely hear myself accept her offer: “I guess so.”

Tenderly: “Why not tell me?”

“All right, Unfaith.... If a person can become a living angel—can a stone angel not become a living person?”

“Sorry?”

“I mean, if the human is, say, enchanted. Like the marble woman in a storybook about Rapunzel—who’s the handiwork of a Sorceress. Could you or your synod, your assembly—”

“Featherhood.”

“Possibly reverse a metamorphosis?” Despite an alarmed face, I continued. “In that book, the painter gives the character life, even by way of earthly pigment. But the Epperly Mill Road statue—humanity replaced by masonry!”

“Rand—”

“In the story, Rapunzel weeps, and her tears cure blindness. Unfaith, if you could just collect a few of my own drops—sort of like a transfusion.... Let them fall onto that rock, and see if it will dissolve.”

“Randall—”

“Just a toe.”

“Dear host, I sense some kind of a connection in your mind—and I don’t blame you for being disturbed—with the girl in—you said the mirror of a vehicle?”

I sucked in a breath. I tried to ignore the notion of a sort of double-exposure: “But she—”

“Randall, no matter how well-meaning, kindly cease. I’m sorry”—she gave my hand a squeeze as firm as her look. I’m sorry but *we do not traffic in magic.*”

Silence. Abashed but not surprised.

“Oh.” So now the unseeing reader would never speak, let alone sing—while the mule or donkey would still bray.

She searched my eyes. “Randall, about this, about this—it’s not what I’d call an obsession—but it’s a powerful cathexis.”

New word but clear enough. “You mean—about the girl in a body-cast?”

“Well, I’m concerned about another type of cast—a spell. And afraid that it isn’t on *her*.”

“Not on *her*,” I said, partly to temporize, to help the implication sink in. But then I blurted out “Unfaith! *She whined!*”

“Who?!” Now it was the Visitor who struggled. Bending forward: “You mean the stone angel?”

“No, flesh and blood!” I felt daylight warm my scalp.

“This was a real person?”

“Yes—and in fact blood was her problem.”

“Who was—or is—she?”

“The daughter of our friends, about twelve years old and a friend of our daughter’s.

“Until... ?”

“The family invited us over for a cookout to celebrate her birthday. The children were playing in the yard, when we heard this plaintive voice. It grew louder as Emily ran alongside the house.

“Randall, I dread the—”

“Picnic, leukocytes. Months afterward, Katie and I visited her in the city where she was isolated for protection. She was so animated, so happy to see her friend—but she had already lost—what should I call it—momentum, of growth.”

“So the statue—” Her mind was working.

“It stunts girl to art.” Long silence. “Unless I can free that effigy, the Bible-reader—unlike Pilgrim—will never turn a page, never laugh with friends—” Choking back tears: “Sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. It’s the *stalk of stupid!*” Again I doffed spectacles, freeing a hand to wipe eyes.

After a few moments, a kindly response: “Randall.... Why not call it a *mystery*?”

I tried to absorb this idea. “Thank you.”

“Did you ever see Emily again?”

Eyes, squeeze hard! “I visited her in the hospital where she lay in some kind of low berth. As I talked with her parents, her face upset me—swollen and flushed. I think she was in pain.”

“I guess you were able to say a few words with her?”

“Yes, but the main thing.... Unfaith, I got up from my chair, walked over to her narrow bed, climbed in, and lay down so that our faces were inches away. I stared into her dark eyes and never cracked a smile.”

“And....”

“*She giggled.*”

Blurry sunlight reflected in the Visitor's eyes. "Randall," she said kindly, "may your own tears heal you."

"Thank you again." But in truth I am less grateful than debilitated: brother, friend, plaster princess.... I wipe the poncho across drops of despair—but damn if it doesn't *catch* again! YANK IT OFF, RANDALL! YANK IT! But my voice is rendered null by an ear-splitting, end-times-CRE-E-AK! As I lie there facing upward, the downhill-leaning trunk becomes wider and wider as it pulls its roots out with a thunderous clump of hillside, as down it sinks until—it scrapes my nose!

"*Ouch!*" But it was someone else's voice! Who, what? A female! I wriggle sideways for a glance at the statue and behold that holy tome on the ground—must have fallen on the bare foot. Hebrew letters are scattered by *zayins*, *mems*, and *kafs* over tan hemlock needles and up to the hem of a luxuriant robe of terre verte. "Let me pick these up," I mutter. But as I crawl in her direction, something tries to stop, now lift me. Hands beneath my arms and torso even drag me—inside a building, then to a chair. Why, today it belonged to the rough-lander! And the empty wine bottle stands near the flowers, name forgotten.

"Randall! You were crawling!"

Must regain consciousness. After a while I try for composure. "Sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me. That *stalk* again!"

Unfaith's handed me a pair of spectacles. "From the deck."

Trex, cathexis, Texas Tires. "Unfaith, the tire! It must have rolled off a piece of equipment they used to build the logging road. Or rolled down to get rid of it. I never spotted it again."



After a while, knees sore, I was able to stand on the deck while grasping a cane of metal rail. Unfaith: “My host, you have quite an imagination. It could be applied—sorry about such a functional word—could follow a more productive....” She pondered. “I think you have a calling.”

“Here it comes!” I thought ruefully. “Now the statue will get no life and I’ll get wings!” Aloud: “As a missionary?”

“A—?”

“A missionary. On behalf of your—“

She smiled: “No, as an *emissary*. A *messenger*. I am offering you a commission.”

“To go somewhere? Not Baluchistan! And the grows!”

“No, to complete that *book*.”

My mouth fell open. I was equally relieved and delighted. “Yes! Thank you for the encour—“

“Here’s a good title: *Apologia for Agnosticism*.”

Silence. But the proposal did spark my curiosity and raise my spirits: “I am honored.”

Unfaith now surveyed the valley through those thick bird-guards. She smiled at me, turned to the railing, and extended a gloved hand. which I clutched to help her ascend. Somehow she climbed to the uppermost tube and balanced on it with my fearful support. As she examined the sky, I asked if she knew the way back. “Yes, I have a landmark, a *Jesus Saves* boulder.”

She merrily yelled, “Come on!” The invitation sounded vaguely familiar, but as I scratched my memory she plummeted head-first.

“*Jesus God!*” I quit breathing as the soles of her boots sank toward the switchgrass and pines. But her wings sprang open with a loud beating just in time to pull out of the dive. Dangling from her left boot was a twist of Oriental bittersweet as she reached the field. There she veered counterclockwise around the vehicle that, however derelict, had managed to outrun its color. She resumed her eastern trajectory and became smaller and smaller, wings undulating as she zipped over the pear petals. She continued uphill over the pasture, directly above her shadow-flaps, blended into the dark woods across the valley, and then reappeared as a blip between two firs that towered over Main Street.



Hearing an automobile climb Annie Lane, I started racing into the house to dispose of the communion vessels. But what should I notice on the deck—a *feather*! Long, gray-and-white, it flapped slightly in the breeze. How incongruous, this organic souvenir next to a composite of plastic film and wood-fibers. I bent over and picked it up by the base of its hollow shaft. Raising it to the sky, admiring its translucence, I recognized the plume as a sign of mission.

